



PERSONAL
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RIGHTEOUSNESS



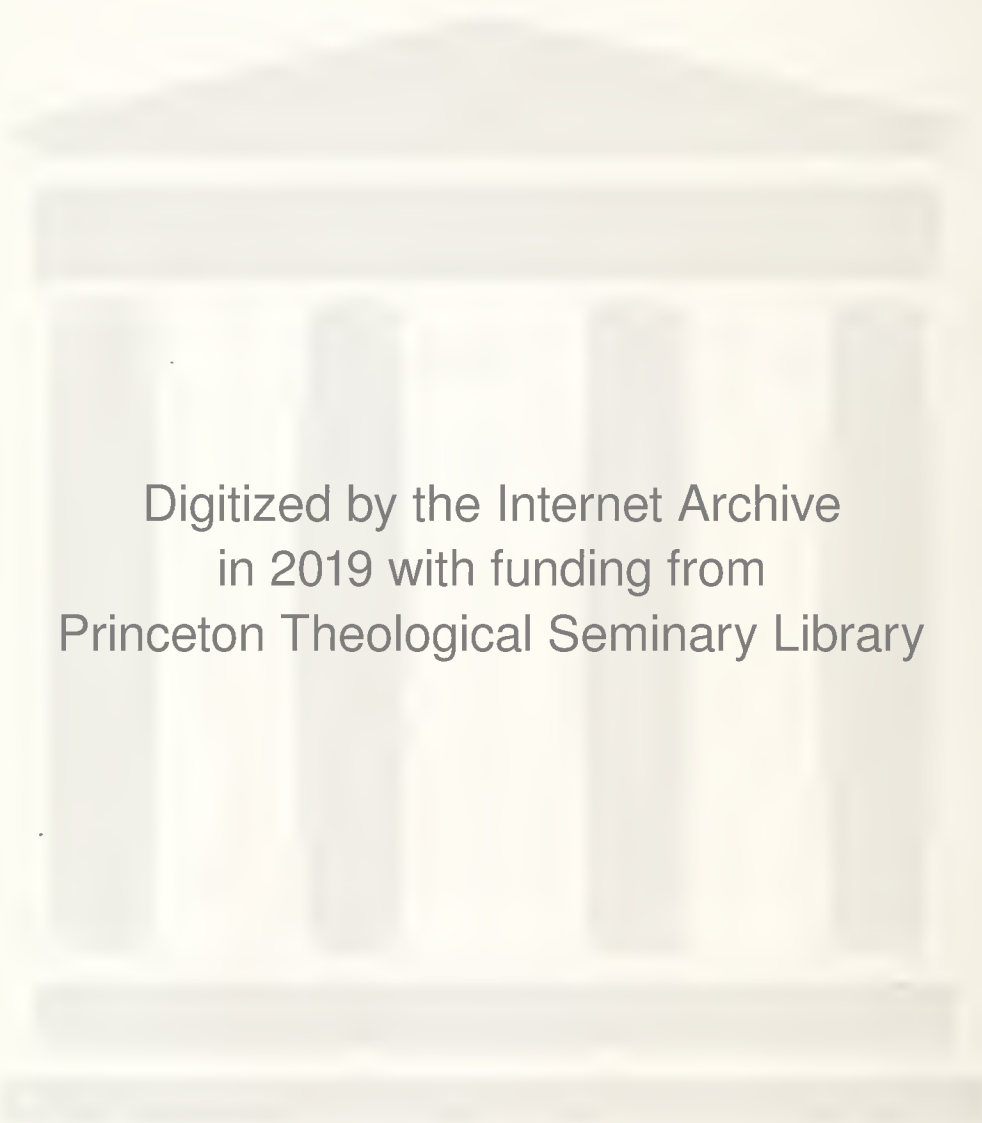
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PERSONAL RELIGION AND PUBLIC
RIGHTEOUSNESS



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PERSONAL RELIGION
AND
PUBLIC RIGHTEOUSNESS

A BOOK FOR LENT

BY THE
REV. PETER GREEN, M.A.

CANON OF MANCHESTER
CHAPLAIN TO H.M. THE KING

WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY
THE LORD BISHOP OF LONDON

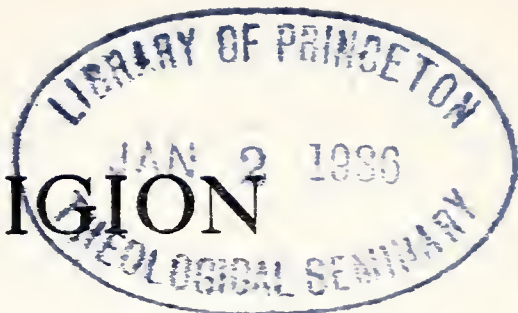
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To the Memory of
LEONARD DENDY AGATE, M.A., Cantab et Manc.
Priest
who during his short ministry at home and abroad
served with fidelity and devotion, and exercised a wide
influence for good,
this book
written in his study
is affectionately dedicated by
the Author.

INTRODUCTION

THIS is in my opinion a most excellent book, and if I mistake not, will be looked upon as one of the most spiritually helpful books of all the long series which we have issued in Lent.

The main contention of it is summed up truly and well¹ at the end of the seventh chapter—“ *The only obstacle to a better world is the lack of a great many more and a great many better servants of God.*”

This is brought home in chapter after chapter, illustrated from the writer's long and varied experience as a parish priest, and the whole forms a book so cogent and so interesting that you cannot put it down till you have finished it.

To explain its interest, I must turn against the writer one of his own stories. Two curates were being compared with one another by an old lady in a parish. One had left for some other work, and for this one she had a kindly feeling and said that she was praying for his future work ; but of the other, the one who had come, she said that he “ *had saving experience.*”

I believe it is because Canon Peter Green has had “ saving experience ” that every argument tells, and the whole book “ finds you.” I think that out of the many timely warnings contained in the book, the one most needed to-day is the warning against the idea that “ the System ” is the bottom of all our social ills, as he tells us

¹Page 98.

all his young Socialist friends imagine, whereas, as he points out, no change of " System " is necessarily going to alter character ; it is the *man himself* who has to be changed. But I need not quote any more. One only spoils a beautiful view by pointing out the beauties in detail, and my belief is—and I can't say more—that any man or woman who reads this book and takes home its many lessons—will be a *better* man or woman.

A. F. London :

PREFACE

THE aim and motive of this book are, I think, indicated with sufficient clearness by the motto I have prefixed to it. It is indeed a fair and necessary question to ask whether the advance, which we so earnestly desire, in public righteousness, will be attained without a great advance in personal holiness. Ten years ago, writing on the topic of personal religion, I suggested that the tasks before the church were (i) the re-statement of the one Faith ; (ii) the reunion of Christendom ; (iii) the Conversion of the world to Christ ; and (iv) the application of His teaching to social needs. To these tasks we must to-day add two more at least, namely (v) the refounding of civilization, shaken by the war ; and (vi) the discovery of a way to international brotherhood. Is our religion adequate to these tasks ? Are we good enough ? Or is it true that " the children are come to the birth and there is not strength to bring forth ? " ¹ It is my own deep conviction that a great advance in personal holiness will alone supply the necessary power in which the tasks before the Church will be performed. We shall " receive power," but only " after that the Holy Ghost is come upon us." ² Hence the line I have followed in this book. Chapter I discusses the futility of all attempts to *do good* without trying to *be good*. Chapter II treats of first hand religion as the only sort that has power. The next four chapters discuss the

¹ Isaiah xxxvii. 3.

² Acts i. 8.

question of the knowledge of God, and the ways in which souls come to that knowledge. The remaining chapters seek to shew how this first hand knowledge of God, this religion firmly based on experience, is what the world needs, and how it may be used in the world's service.

It may well be that some of my readers, anxious to do something to help a suffering and distracted world, longing, as they will say, to "get to work to help others," will be impatient with my insistence on the need for personal holiness, personal religion. If any reader does feel that impatience I can only repeat that this whole book is inspired by nothing else but the conviction that personal holiness is an absolutely necessary preliminary to all effective social service. For what the world really wants is not you nor me but God. And He can only shine through a sanctified personality, and only work through a surrendered will. When we have perfectly learned that truth no triumphs will be too great for us to achieve.

CONTENTS

CHAPTER	PAGE
I.—GOD'S LENTEN CALL TO THE SOUL.. ..	I
II.—THE RELIGION THAT HAS POWER	10
III.—THE KNOWLEDGE OF GOD.. ..	19
IV.—VARIETIES OF RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCE	
(i) MYSTICAL	28
V.—VARIETIES OF RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCE	
(ii) MORAL	37
VI.—VARIETIES OF RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCE	
(iii) PRACTICAL	46
VII.—THE WORLD'S NEED OF GOD	56
VIII.—GOD'S CLAIM TO BE MASTER	66
IX.—THE DISCIPLINE OF DAILY LIFE	75
X.—THE POWER OF GOD UNTO SALVATION ..	84
XI.—THE CHRISTIAN IN THE WORLD TO-DAY ..	94
XII.—THE CHRISTIAN AND THE COMING KINGDOM	103

“ It is a fair and necessary question to ask whether we have not reached the limits in our advance toward public righteousness without a corresponding advance in personal religion.”

From—*The Function of the Church in Modern Society.*

By WILLIAM JEWITT TUCKER.

CHAPTER I

GOD'S LENTEN CALL TO THE SOUL

LENT comes to us, year by year, as a direct call from God. A call to greater strictness of life, more earnest thought on serious subjects, more strenuous effort after holiness. And since it is really true that "the penance of religious men is sweeter than the pleasures of courtiers" the call is a welcome one. It calls us from care for things that don't matter to care for things that do. It speaks to us of struggles and victories and rewards which involve our whole nature, and the highest, best, and most real part of our being. It is a call that braces us, nerving us to efforts which even while we shrink from them we feel to be worth making. And while it demands effort it promises a more than adequate reward. The lad who said "I'm glad to-morrow is Ash Wednesday. I mean to have a good strict Lent this year. Then I shall have a happy Easter" expressed, in simply boyish words, some deep spiritual truths, and showed that he was not without religious experience of his own.

And yet, as we get on in life, does not a certain doubt, a certain depression, mingle with this anticipation of Lent? We feel that we have gone through all this sort of thing before, and nothing much has come of it. We have had strict well kept Lents, times when religion was a pleasure, and prayer and worship real sources

of strength and power, when God and the soul and the unseen things of the spirit were more real than the visible and tangible things of the world around us, and yet what has been the result? We have always slipped back again into slackness, carelessness, worldliness. Perhaps we cannot say that nothing has been gained. But we feel that a very great deal of spiritual effort, of hope and prayer, and high endeavour, has yielded very little lasting fruit for God's glory, or the welfare of others, or our own soul's growth. We ask ourselves whether the Christian life is always to be a weary round of sinning, and repenting, and trying again, only to sin afresh and need a fresh repentance. Surely it ought to be possible to make the Christian life a really victorious progress "from strength to strength till we appear, everyone of us, before our God in Sion."¹ If, even when all allowance has been made for occasional defeats, we cannot regard our soul's life as one of steady progress, what is the cause?

Perhaps at times we are tempted to doubt the power and reality of religion altogether. The joy and happiness of past Lents, we are tempted to think, was mere emotionalism, stirred feelings which settled down again without effecting anything. We worked ourselves up, or let others work us up, into a state which could not last, and we fear lest every time we try to re-capture the emotional excitement of those days, we should find the task harder and the results less permanent. "You have tried religion" the tempter whispers, "and found out for yourself that there is nothing in it. You will

¹ Ps. lxxxiv. 7.

be a fool if you let yourself be taken in again." And in such a mood it is terribly easy to drop religion altogether, or at best to fall into a state of merely conventional religious observance.

But let us, at this point, consider something which, at first sight, seems to have nothing to do with what we have been thinking about but which may be found to have a very real connection. Almost every clergyman who has been any length of time engaged in parish work, can recall cases of young people, both men and women, who have at one time been inspired with real zeal for social work, and who have declared that they wished to devote all their lives to working for the betterment of their fellowmen. But sooner or later they became discouraged. They seemed to effect so little, and their fellow workers, whom they credited with a zeal like their own, revealed, when they came to know them well, so many unattractive qualities, and the people they worked for, and whom they desired to help, proved so sluggish, and irresponsive, and ungrateful. And so they became disillusioned. How that disillusionment shews itself will depend on the nature of the individual. Some men come to disbelieve in human nature altogether. Human nature, they say, is what it is, and only a fool will try to change it; everyone must look out for himself. And so the man who started life as a perfectly sincere philanthropist ends it as a self-seeking grasper, perhaps even as a sanctimonious hypocrite who, almost unconsciously, masks his own selfishness under the old phrases about service, betterment, and the uplifting of the poor. It may well be that the reader has met such cases himself. But nobler natures, instead of growing cynical and selfish,

grow bitter and angry, angry with man and angry with God. Some years ago I had such a man talking to me in my study. He was a socialist who had spent twelve or fifteen years in public life and he was angry with the rich, for what he thought their callous indifference, and angry with the poor, for what he thought their slavish content, and angry with God, for allowing such things to go on. And when he had talked to me for some time, till his passion brought out the sweat on his forehead in great drops, I said to him "Do you know what you remind me of? You remind me of Jonah. God is saying to you '*Doest thou well to be angry?*' and you are replying '*I do well to be angry, even unto death.*' But all the while you are failing just because you lack God, and His help." Is not this true? Is not the chief, one might almost say the only cause, of the failure of much of our social work the fact that it is not done in the power of the Spirit of God, and so the workers deteriorate as they grow older? They make the fatal mistake of trying to *do good* without trying to *be good*. Nay, they often boast that they have no time to think of themselves, or their own ^{own}salvation, and even sneer at those who are concerned about "saving their own dirty souls." And so the weapons of their warfare—and, no matter how much our work may be concerned with temporal and material things, it is still always true that the weapons of our warfare are the powers of our souls, our sympathy, that is to say, and our patience, and our unselfishness and courage, and faith—get blunted. For they forget that if it is true that 'nothing but the Infinite Pity is sufficient for the infinite pathos of human life' it is equally true that nothing but the fruit of the Spirit, love, joy, peace,

long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, self restraint, will be found an adequate equipment for anyone who aspires to be a worker with and for his fellows. Those who try to do good while themselves cut off from God, the only source of all good, court failure and disappointment.

What has all this to do with that lack of steady progress in holiness, and that consequent disillusionment and dissatisfaction with our religion, which we were thinking of at the beginning of this chapter? Why just this, that the mistake religious people make is often just the opposite one to that made by many earnest and sincere social workers. They are so busy trying to do good that they forget to try to be good ; we are so anxious to gain true holiness that we sometimes forget that even this, the supreme gift of God, is given to be used, and, if not used, will be lost. If they are like soldiers who are so eager for victory that they rush all unarmed and untrained into the battle, are not we, too often, like soldiers who make our drill and our evolutions ends in themselves, and are so keen on keeping our weapons bright, and our equipment clean, that we never descend into the dust and turmoil of the fight?

Is not this just exactly the charge which many people to-day are bringing against the members of all the churches? When we blame them for neglecting religion they reply " Well, and what is the good of your religion? What is the fruit of all your church-going? To whom does it do any good but yourselves? " And just because it does no good to others it often does little good to ourselves, and so our critics declare, not always without some shew of justice, that our religion is merely

selfishness and emotional self-indulgence. Nothing will help us so much in our spiritual life as to look on it as training for a spiritual warfare. We are to seek true holiness so that, body, mind and soul being subdued to the guidance of God the Holy Ghost, He may be able perfectly to work through us for the salvation of the whole world. "For their sakes" said Christ, "I sanctify Myself,"¹ and it is for "their" sakes, the sake of our brethren throughout the world, that we must ask Him to sanctify us. The world is wrong to despise holiness, for it is the thing most needed in the world to-day. Nothing has such power as true holiness, nothing exercises, over all sorts and conditions of men, such an attraction. But the world is right to look askance at us if we seek holiness in any spirit of selfishness, and not that we may use it for God's glory, and the help of our fellow men.

Does this mean that everyone who seeks truer holiness this Lent must take up some special work, after Easter, as church or social worker? Certainly not. What will help us to persevere, and save us from falling back into carelessness and indifference, and constantly nerve us to fresh efforts, is not the consciousness that we are doing some particular piece of work, which the world can recognise and estimate at its true value. Still less is it the desire to see the fruits of our efforts here and now. No! what will nerve us and sustain us will be the realization that we are not working for ourselves, but for our Captain of Salvation, and our fellow soldiers in the great war. I think we may learn a lesson from a friend of mine, an elderly working man, who, being over

¹ S. John xvii. 19.

sixty when war broke out, joined the National Volunteers and was set to guard a railway bridge. At first there was great keenness but as the years dragged on he was almost the only man who retained his first zeal. After the armistice some of his old comrades were chaffing him about his drills, and watches, and nights on guard. "What good did you do?" one of them asked him. "Nothing ever happened." "No." he replied quite placidly "but I was there if I was wanted. I felt I was doing my bit." In the hour of England's need he had had his vision, and, having once had that, nothing seemed to him trivial or useless or wearisome. It is no light thing, in Christ's great war between good and evil, to know that we are there, if we are wanted, and by His grace, are doing our bit.

But indeed we can never tell how or when God will use us, and the great thing to remember is that what matters is very much less what we do than what we are. Many people never realize this, and all of us are tempted to forget it. Yet if we think carefully we shall realize that the greatest abilities, the most ceaseless activity, and the most earnest zeal may accomplish little if faults of character and temper hinder God using you as His instrument, whereas the man who is really good, who, that is to say, is so submitted to God's will that the Holy Spirit can work through him freely and unhindered, cannot fail to achieve great things, no matter how small his abilities, how restricted his sphere, or how poor the visible results. For in this case God Himself is the worker and He cannot fail.

During the war I had an example of the compelling power of real holiness. Visiting one day in a military

hospital I asked a soldier my usual opening question "What were you in the army? R.C. or C. of E., or what?" He replied "The Chaplain said I was put down C. of E. because I was nowt else." I looked at him for a moment and said, "I dare say, but that's not true of you now." "Eh, no," he replied, "I found God, out there in France, and life won't be long enough to shew Him I'm not ungrateful." And then he went on to tell me of his conversion. He was first led to think seriously of religion by the silent example of a young, undersized, quite undistinguished private in the same company as himself. And his discription of the man is worth giving in his own words "Eh! he was a good little fellow. I wanted to be like him. In training in England, and out there in France, in the trenches, and in the rest camp, by day and by night, eh! when he was awake and when he was asleep, his religion was a part of him. He was a good little fellow. I tell you I wanted to be like him." I do not think I ever heard genuine affection and admiration ring in a man's tone more heartily than they did in his, and constantly he came back to the same words. "Eh! he was a good little fellow. I wanted to be like him." If the "good little fellow" has never done anything else in life has his religion been in vain, or his time here on earth been wasted? He has shewn to another the beauty of true goodness and, by no gifts or graces of his own but by the compelling power of holiness, drawn a soul to God. No bad life's work, surely, though he were killed the day after.

So then if we would keep our religion fresh and living, and just because it is living, also growing, let us remember that "none of us liveth to himself, and no man dieth

to himself" ¹ and that though religion is, and must be, the most intensely *personal* thing in the world, yet it is never *merely* personal. It has been truly and beautifully said "We are saved, that we may serve." Let us pray to God, this Lent, to give us a deeper sense of both sides of this truth. We must look to the Lord and be saved, for we must not presume to try to do good without trying to be good. Yet in every effort after holiness we must remember that we, if we are to be like our Master, must seek holiness as a means to an end, not as an end in itself, and that end must be a twofold one, namely the glory of God and the service of our fellow men. If we strive to keep the thought of these two glorious ends always steadily before us we shall not grow weary nor indifferent in our religion.

¹ Rom. xiv. 7.

CHAPTER II

THE RELIGION THAT HAS POWER

IN the first chapter we noticed two fundamental truths of religion. Firstly, we noticed that religion means service, and that even God's greatest gift, the gift of sanctification or true holiness, is not given us to be kept but to be used, not to be hoarded for our own profit but to be spent for the benefit of others. And secondly, we noticed that holiness is a thing we cannot do without, since it has more power with men than wealth, or station, or brains, or charm of manner, or anything else.

And a very little thought will convince us of the absolute truth of both of these things. Indeed once clearly seen they are recognised as self-evident, and needing no proof. All man's gifts and graces and powers are his to be poured out in the service of others. When we allow ourselves to forget "the words of the Lord Jesus, how He said It is more blessed to give than to receive,"¹ we forget the real true essential nature of man. Christ's words are no strange eastern paradox but a quite plain, simple, homely statement of an obvious truth about human nature which anyone can verify for himself. The old woman in my parish who, just before she died at the age of seventy-six, said to me "There's one thing one

¹ Acts xx. 35.

never grows tired of, and that's doing things for other folk. And there's one thing one never has enough of, and that's making other folk happy," had proved this truth for herself. And the amazing response of boys, in every class and in every country, to the appeal of the Scout law of service, which bids them do a kind act every day, proves that what is true for the old is doubly true for generous uncorrupted youth. And the reason of all this lies, as I have said, deep in the very nature of man. For we are made in the image of God, and what He is we are to become. But God is ever a Giver, not a Receiver. His joy is to pour Himself out in blessing on His creatures. So too man, if he desires to be true to his own nature, and to know happiness, must live "as one that serveth."¹ For the man who is not spending and being spent in the service of others is like a sun which is not pouring out light and warmth, or like a fountain not pouring out water. And so he is restless and miserable, for any organism which is not working properly, which is not, as a doctor would say, "functioning properly" is a cause of discomfort, pain, and at last death. But many people who recognise this with respect to most things, and quite clearly realize that the selfish man is the miserable man, forget it with respect to religion. Yet it would not be too much to say that most of the disappointment and disillusionment in religion felt by those who are really trying to serve God, as well as most of the impatience with, and contempt for, religion felt by worldly and careless men and women, are due to so many of the Master's disciples having failed to lay to heart His words "For *their* sakes therefore I

¹ S. Luke xxii. 27.

sanctify Myself.”¹ Try earnestly to be holy ; seek sanctification of body, mind, and soul ; it is the highest and noblest endeavour man can set before him, and indeed represents that for which man is in the world, the true end and object of his being. But while you seek it *for* yourself remember to seek it always *for the sake* of others.

But if our first thought, namely that holiness, like everything else, is given to man to be used in the service of others, is seen to be quite obvious when we consider it carefully, and is recognised as having its roots deep in the essential nature of man, the second thought, namely that nothing has such attractive power with others as true goodness, will be seen to be equally self-evident, and equally rooted and grounded in man’s essential nature. For goodness is godliness or true likeness to God, and holiness is conformity to the pattern of God, Who is Holy. But what should man desire but likeness to God, or what should attract him except godliness ? It is what he was made for. It is his true nature. It is really as natural to him as water to a fish, or air to a bird. All the great masters of religion have known and taught this truth, and I once heard it beautifully expressed by a preacher who said “ There is nothing so native to man as God, nor anywhere where he is so completely at home.” It is of course true that man can so forsake his true nature, and can so corrupt his tastes and faculties, that goodness may become hateful to him, and he may fall to what Clarendon, the historian, calls “ an impudent delight in wickedness.” And it is also true, of course, that every time we sin

¹ S. John xvii. 19.

voluntarily we weaken our power to recognise the beauty of holiness, or to desire it when we see it. But this is the corruption of our true nature. Naturally man is drawn to holiness as iron is attracted to a magnet, and it is absolutely true that

“ We needs must love the highest when we see it.” It is worth while laying stress on this ; it is worth while thinking often about it ourselves, and trying to bring it often before other people, for the ordinary man too often speaks and thinks of religion as if it were something strange and unnatural, and even as if a religious man was less truly manly than one who neglects his God. Whereas of course the exact opposite is true. A man or woman whose soul is unawakened and whose spiritual powers are undeveloped, who cannot pray or worship, or know the joy of communion with God, is a man or woman the best part of whose nature is wanting. No matter how well built and finely developed in body a boy may be, yet if his mind is entirely undeveloped and atrophied, you would say of him “ Oh ! poor fellow, he’s not all there.” With even greater truth it may be said of the man whose soul has been neglected, and left untrained and unexercised, that he is not all there. The best part of him is lacking. For Christ Jesus, the Man perfectly submitted to His Heavenly Father’s will, is “ the Truth,” the pattern, type, and example that is to say, of what man is meant to be. Hence the attractive power of holiness. Just as perfect health and wholeness in a living creature, whether animal or human being, attracts us, or perfect beauty in any work of art, or perfect truth and aptness in a work of science or of philosophy, so real godliness in a human character draws

and attracts us. For what health is to the body, or beauty to the work of art, or truth to the scientific statement, so holiness is to the entire man. It is his true nature, his perfection, his ideal state and end. How truly says the prophet. "Ten men shall take hold out of all languages of the nations, even shall take hold of the skirt of him that is a Jew, (*i.e.* the man who has first-hand knowledge of God) saying We will go with you: for we have heard that God is with you."¹ For there is no attraction like the attraction of true godliness.

If then our religion is real it should be something which evidently concerns and influences others besides ourselves. And it should draw others to God. It is not to the worker in the mission field abroad to whom alone the words are spoken "Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature." No! nor only to clergy and church workers at home. In all the world, everywhere where there is a disciple of Jesus Christ, there should be a centre of evangelisation, someone who by life and example always, and by kind and gentle yet at the same time bold and fearless words when occasion serves, is preaching the gospel, making disciples, and extending the Kingdom of Heaven. Quite clearly all this is involved not merely in our baptismal promise to be Christ's faithful soldiers and servants unto our lives' ends, but by the very nature of Christianity, and the very constitution of Christ's Kingdom. If then we are doing nothing to advance that Kingdom, if we are drawing no one nearer to God, our religion is a failure. And we must remember that no man's religion can be a success for himself if it is a

¹ Zachariah viii. 23.

failure for others. Are we then doing anything for others? This is a point worth thinking about.

But do not let us make the mistake of judging ourselves too hardly or too hastily. The truth is what we want, and it is often quite as dangerous to give way unduly to depression and despair as it is to indulge in conceit and self-satisfaction. It happens to all of us, at times, to fall into the mood in which the prophet Elijah asked of God that he might die, and said "It is enough; now, O Lord, take away my life; for I am not better than my fathers."¹ Indeed it is so common that a friend of mine, a master in spiritual things and one who has helped many, often speaks of what he calls "the juniper tree feeling" and warns people against it. And we shall do well to be on our guard against giving way to passing fits of depression. I had a very striking example of their danger soon after the Armistice. A voluntary church worker, whom I will call Miss A, who for many years has done splendid work as a Sunday School teacher, a temperance and Band of Hope worker, and a worker with girls, came to me to say that she had decided to give up all her voluntary work. "I myself fail so constantly," she said, "that I am ashamed to go on pretending to lead and help others. And besides I really effect nothing. I can't see that I am doing any good." I persuaded her to reconsider her decision, assuring her that she was only suffering from the depression which was so widespread at the time, and which was so natural a result of the long-drawn-out strain of the war. Within a few days two girls, speaking of the difficulties and tempta-

¹ 1 Kings xix. 4.

tions of the place where they worked, said "Of course we are lucky. We work in the same room as Miss A, and she's different. All the girls feel it." If we are really sure that we desire to be "faithful soldiers and servants" of our Saviour we must not be downhearted if at times we seem to effect little. We may lay to heart the words of the psalmist "Heaviness may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning"¹ And we may remember another thing: we cannot always enjoy the pleasures of religion, but we can always do our best in the service of God and our fellow men.

We cannot kindle when we will
 The fire that in the heart resides,
 The spirit bloweth and is still,
 In mystery our soul abides :
 But tasks in hours of insight will'd
 Can be through hours of gloom fulfill'd.²

But while we refuse to allow ourselves to give way to depression where our conscience tells us that we are really, by God's grace, doing our best, we must not refuse to recognise unpleasant truths where there is real cause for dissatisfaction. If we feel that our religion really has little power in our own lives (and it is its effect in our own lives that we can best judge of, and which is the safest test of its real value) we may be sure that it has little in the lives of others. And we must then boldly face the question as to why it is so

Is it because ours is not a real, vital, living religion at all? Everyone must begin with what I may call a second-hand religion; a religion that says "We have heard with ears, and our fathers have declared unto us,

¹ Ps. xxx. 5.

² "Morality" by Matthew Arnold.

the noble works that Thou didst in their days, and in the old time before them." In religion, as in everything else, young people must be content to take things at second-hand on the authority of those older and wiser than themselves, till they can prove them for themselves. I have seen scores, I might say hundreds, of young people whose religion at first has been second-hand, derived from me, or from their mothers, or from some other friend, but who, by steady perseverance, and waiting upon God, have come to a strong and vital religion of their own. But not till we have real religious experience, real first-hand knowledge of God, will our religion have much power in our own lives, or any power at all in the lives of others. Not unless we "speak that we do *know* and testify that we have *seen*" will people be likely to receive our witness. For men and women are quick to recognise true religion when they meet it. I was once speaking to an old bed-ridden woman about a new curate who had come to take the place of one who had been in the habit of visiting her, but had left to go to other work. The former curate had visited her for some years; the new one only for a week or two, yet she said "Mr. A was a nice young gentleman. I'm sure he was good and in earnest, and I pray for him in his new work. But the new young gentleman is different. He has *saving experience*. You can tell that he knows his Lord." The old woman was right. The first curate was a good earnest and sincere man who has since, I believe, developed into a real pastor of souls. But his successor was a man who had known bodily suffering, and spiritual struggle, and had to fight for his faith, and, going down into the vale of misery, had learned to

know the power of grace. He had, as the old woman recognised, 'saving experience.' Now here, it would appear, we touch a vital question. We all have to begin, in religion as in everything else, by learning from those who have gone before us, from those older and wiser than we are, whom God has given to be our "governors, teachers, spiritual pastors and masters." But this second-hand religion, though a necessary preparation for a vital religion of our own, is only a preparation. It has little power in our own lives; it has no power at all to help or inspire others. I cannot doubt that much of the failure of the church to-day, and indeed in every age since the days of the great persecutions, is that many people who are supposed to be, and who believe themselves to be, really religious have no vital religious experience of their own. They know *about* God, but they do not *know* God. But if we are in earnest about our religion, if we believe that to have a vital religion of one's own is the greatest blessing in life, and to pass it on to others is the greatest service we can do to the world we shall seriously enquire, and earnestly ask God to teach us, what answer we ought to give to the question "Is my religion my very own? Is it firmly based on experience?"

CHAPTER III

THE KNOWLEDGE OF GOD

It is possible that some of my readers may have been depressed by the last chapter, and that others may have doubted its wisdom. Some may have anxiously asked themselves "Have I, perhaps, no vital religion at all? Have I been deceiving myself all the time?" Others may have been thinking "What is the good of disturbing people's minds with such questions? Will they not drive many humble and simple minded people into nervous doubts and questionings, and even into despair, while encouraging the self-confident and presumptuous to rely on religious experiences which may be mere delusions?"

I would not deny that there are such dangers connected with the thoughts suggested in the last chapter. But then religion is a dangerous thing. Do not be surprised at such a statement. There is nothing to be had in this life which is worth the gaining which can be had without danger. Life itself is dangerous, a perilous adventure, and religion, which is the highest life of the entire man, has been well described as the supreme adventure. And since there is nothing that the world needs to-day so much as true religion—all great statesmen, and thinkers, and prophets are agreed that we shall not rebuild England and Europe and the whole

world without what they call "spiritual sanctions"—we must not allow ourselves to shrink from the task of making sure that our religion is securely based. What would our generals have done if, when they realized the war was unavoidable, they had had any, even the slightest, reason to fear that their guns were of an obsolete pattern, or their high explosives untrustworthy? They would have left no stone unturned till either the fear was proved groundless, or the mistake remedied. So with the Church Militant. She must be assured that her armour is of the right kind, the armour of God.

But indeed we need not fear, if only we are in earnest. True religion is the knowledge and love of God. And whatever else our Heavenly Father, in His infinite wisdom and love, may grant or withhold in answer to our prayers, there is one thing He will never deny to those who diligently seek it, and that is the knowledge of Himself. Indeed He has definitely and expressly promised it. "For they shall all know Me, from the least of them unto the greatest of them, saith the Lord."¹ And our Blessed Lord confirms this promise for He said "I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly."² And again "And this is life eternal, that they might know Thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ Whom Thou hast sent."³ So then we may be confident that if we truly desire this knowledge of God which He Himself has promised, and which is truly our life, life eternal, we shall not be left lacking it, *provided we are prepared to pay the price*. I say again, provided we are prepared

¹ Jeremiah xxxi. 34.

² S. John x. 10.

³ S. John xvii. 3.

to pay the price, for many people, who would be the first to admit that the world's prizes are only to be gained at the cost of earnest endeavour, and that no man gains fame, or knowledge, or wealth, or success in the arts or sciences, without strenuous effort, seem to think that their religion should cost them nothing. They need to be reminded of our Lord's words that "strait is the gate and narrow is the way that leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it."¹ The man who found the treasure hid in the field, the merchant man who found the pearl of great price, each is represented to us, by our Blessed Lord, as selling all that he had² to buy the treasure that his heart desired. We may not be asked by God to give up all that we have—though again we may be—but one thing is certain, namely that a religion which costs nothing is worth what it costs. And it is just those whose religion has cost them most who are the first to say that it is worth all, and more than all, that they have paid for it. I have a friend who was once a prosperous business man, with a wife, two children, health, and prospects. To-day his wife and children are dead, his business gone and he, a broken man, working for a small wage, hops the world on one leg and a crutch. What does he say of the way God has treated him? He says "I never knew how good God was till He took away everything else." I do not say that all, or indeed most, have to go through so much in order to earn a true religion. I know that it is not so. God, like a wise gardener, knows that some plants do best in the sunshine, some in the shade, that some can stand, and need, pruning with a heavy hand while

¹ S. Matt. vii. 14.

² S. Matt. xiii. 44-46.

others may be lightly treated, and He deals with each as is best for each, and asks of no one of us one single pang more than is for his good. And happy indeed is that soul which is so trustful of our Heavenly Father, so surrendered to His Will, that little or no discipline is needed for its perfection. But whether in joy, and in the brightness of His countenance, or in sorrow and suffering, and through the valley of the shadow, the lesson must be learned, and the prize striven for, and earned. No man stumbles by accident into a true religion, or strolls into the Kingdom of Heaven. For if it is true that God longs to make Himself known to all His children, it is equally true that "Verily Thou art a God that hidest Thyself, O God of Israel, the Saviour."¹ He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him.² Much of the failure of religion to-day is due to a low, unworthy, irreverent conception of its claims and its cost. Our religion, at least as far as we ourselves are concerned, lacks sternness, austerity, reverence and the spirit of sacrifice.

Remembering then that a true religion, the really intimate and personal knowledge of God, will not be gained without effort, nor bought save at a great price, let us try to see how men come to a true religion. And here we do well to remember that no two men come to God along exactly the same path. It has been beautifully said "There are as many paths to the feet of God as there are souls to tread those paths." So the religious experience of one soul will never be exactly the same as that of another just because no two souls are ever exactly alike. Many years ago I was disputing, in the

¹ Isaiah xlv. 15.

² Heb. xi. 6.

Town Hall Square, in Leeds, with a street orator. Suddenly he exclaimed "To hear you speak anyone would think that you did not believe that all men are born equal." "All men born equal!" I exclaimed. "God forbid I should believe such desolating nonsense. No two men are born equal. God never made a man like me before since the world began, and will never make another as long as the world lasts. Nor one like my friend the speaker either. That is what gives value to souls. Every one is unique." This of course is true. If all souls were alike, or even if all were made after a few patterns, then the loss of a few out of so many million would be of no more importance than the loss of a few grains of corn out of 10 million bushels. But if each soul is unique, unlike any other, the work of a supreme creative Artist who never repeats His designs nor duplicates a pattern, then each soul is of infinite value, and if lost can never be replaced. And if each soul is thus unique, like other souls in many ways no doubt yet also in some real way unlike any other soul, then its experience will be different too. Yet religious experience falls into certain great, broadly marked classes. And it is a real help to try and distinguish the various types of religious experience, and to seek to understand to which type our own religious experience, or that of our friends, belongs. For by so recognising different types of religious experience we shall be protected against two dangers, namely those of arrogance and of depression.

Many people who have had some very vivid experience are inclined to think that anyone who has not come to God exactly along the same lines cannot know Him

at all. They are tempted, that is to say, arrogantly to deny all religious experience but their own. Some time ago I had been preaching out for a friend, and in the train back found myself next one of the congregation I had just been addressing. He described, with deep feeling and obvious sincerity, his own conversion and what he described as his "New Birth." I think the language he used was theologically incorrect, and what he called "regeneration" should have been called "conversion." But I am sure he described a real, and deeply blessed, religious experience, and differences of theological terminology are not important in such cases. As he got out of the train he pressed my hand and said "I shall pray that some day *you too may come to know the Lord.*" Five and twenty years ago I should have been angry at what would have seemed to me an uncalled for impertinence. But now I think I understand the man, and "to understand all, is to forgive all." The man's own religious experience was so vivid, and so satisfying, that he could not imagine any other, or that anyone who had not had one exactly the same could have had anything of real value at all. But surely he lost a good deal in sympathetic understanding of what Juliana of Norwich would have called "his even Christians," and in grateful recognition of the infinite variety of God's working with souls.

But just as a failure to recognise the truth that souls come to the knowledge of God along many different paths leads some to undue arrogance, so it leads others to unnecessary depression. Simple self-distrusting men and women hear someone speaking of his spiritual experiences and ask themselves "Why have I never

felt and experienced anything like this man? Is he deceiving himself, or is there something seriously lacking in me and in my religion? ” If they recognised the infinite variety of the ways in which God draws souls to Himself they might recognise that their own knowledge of God is as real, and as securely based, as that of the speaker whose account of his conversion now depresses them.

What then are the chief outstanding types of religious experience? Without trying to make an exhaustive analysis I think we may recognise a few. First there are direct experiences of the soul in the shape of visions, voices, and similar things. No doubt these are exceptional, but they are nothing like as rare as people suppose. Indeed I have seldom spoken in public, whether in a sermon or in any other way, upon the subject of religious experiences without hearing afterwards, from some of my audience who wished to tell me of what they had themselves experienced. No doubt some were cases of self-delusion and hysteria, but not all. Many have borne on them the stamp of reality. Much of the sense of unreality with which, too often, people read their Bibles is due to the fact that while they think they believe in miracles as having happened in Syria in the first century, they would never believe that the same kind of thing could happen in London or Manchester in the twentieth century. If, however, we could all conquer our British shyness and speak freely to one another of religious matters, saying, in no spirit of boastfulness or vain-glory, but with a single eye to mutual encouragement and help, “ O come hither, and harken, all ye that fear God, and I will

tell you what He hath done for my soul,"¹ we should learn how true it is that the experience of the servants of God has been the same in every age, and that there is nothing in Holy Scripture, except the greatest miracles of our Blessed Lord Himself, which cannot be paralleled in the present day, and in every age. But we need to remember firstly that in every age those who have enjoyed the special and miraculous experiences have been the small minority, and secondly that the persons who enjoy them are not necessarily the most favoured. A man is not to be accounted more holy, more religious, more truly spiritual because he has had such experiences, nor less so because he has not. Rightly used such things are, like all else that God sends, a blessing; misused they can be a terrible danger and snare. But they are real, and when we meet them, in our own lives or the lives of others, we ought to recognise them as part of the material of which religion is made.

More common, and—if one may venture to say so, where one is comparing one method by which God works with another—more safe is what we may call moral experience. It may be the experience, so common in what are called 'instantaneous' conversions, of God coming into a restless, unhappy, distracted life and bringing power, joy, and unity of purpose. Such surely is the experience expressed in the well-known lines of Doddridge's hymn "O happy day"

Now rest my long-divided heart,
Fixed on this blissful centre, rest;
Nor ever from my Lord depart,
With Him of every good possessed.

¹ Ps. lxvi. 14.

Or again it may be the growing realization of the fact that "the pure in heart shall see God" and that a good life is in itself an experience of God. For if it is true, as St. John says, that "When He shall appear, we shall be like Him; for we shall see Him as He is"¹ it is equally true that *when we are like Him He shall appear*, for, according to the old mystical doctrine, "Only like can know like," and we know God just to the extent that we are holy, godly, god-like. And so a steady effort after a good life is the broad highway to the knowledge of God. If we call the knowledge of God which comes by visions and revelations mystical experience of God, then we may call the knowledge which comes through delivery from the bondage of sin, and daily effort after holiness, by the name of moral experience of God.

And then we may go on to recognise a third type of experience of God which I would call practical experience of God. It comes from a constantly growing sense of God's guiding and protecting hand in daily life, whether in one's own life, or that of others, or in the course of history, and is a very real path to God. But we must consider religious experience, and its identity in all ages, and its infinite variety in different souls, more in detail in the next chapters.

¹ 1 S. John iii. 2.

CHAPTER IV

VARIETIES OF RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCE—(I) MYSTICAL

IN the last chapter we distinguished three main types of religious experience, mystical, moral, and practical. No doubt these types of experience shade imperceptibly into one another so that it may often be difficult to say, of some particular experience, into which class we ought to put it. But speaking broadly the classification will hold and will prove useful. And our task in this chapter will be to consider examples of the first kind. And such examples as we examine will be drawn, as far as possible, in equal proportion from the Bible and from the experience of living men and women. For our object is to display the identity of religious experience in all ages, and to shew that the way in which God revealed Himself to Abraham, Moses, or Isaiah is the same as that in which He reveals Himself to men and women to-day. For it is only the unimportant things, the outward things such as clothes, and manners, and customs, which alter with time. The great and vital things, the eternal verities of divine and human nature, do not change. That is why the greatest literature, which deals with the simple and profound facts of God and man, sin and repentance, love and hatred, life and death, never grows old. Some smart novel of to-day will seem utterly out of date ten years hence. The dust lies thick on books which were once hailed as masterpieces of insight and power. But for the penitent sinner the

51st Psalm is as fresh as on the day it was written and on the day of his conversion any man, be he Englishman, Kafir, Chinaman or Hindoo, can understand the 12th Chapter of Isaiah. Indeed one of the chief objects of reading the Bible should be to compare and contrast the examples of God's dealings with souls which are described in it with the examples of His dealings which we ourselves observe in daily life. Nothing gives such interest to our Bible study as the discovery of something in the life of one of the patriarchs, prophets, or saints of which we can say "Why after all that is no different from what happened to so and so whom I knew well." And equally nothing so deepens in us a sense of the reality—the "objectivity" if I may borrow a word from philosophy—of religion as to find our own religious experience explained and justified in Holy Scripture. Let us examine one or two typical examples of mystical religious experience.

Take the wonderful dialogue between God and Moses recorded in Exodus xxxiii, verse 12 to the end. Read the passage carefully and you will notice, in the experience described, the following elements:

(i) Moses, oppressed by a sense of his own weakness, and of the magnitude of his task, cries to God "If Thy presence go not with me, carry us not up hence." And God replies "My presence shall go with thee, and I will give thee rest."

(ii) When God assures Moses of His protection and help He says "Thou hast found grace in my sight and I know thee by name." That is to say Moses has a deep sense of God's knowledge of, and interest in, him *as an individual whom He knows personally.*

(iii) Moses asks to see God's *glory*, but God, passing this request by without comment, promises that all His *goodness* shall be revealed to him.

(iv) Moses, desiring to see God, is hidden in a cleft in the rock, shadowed by God's hand, and it is not till the hand is removed, and God has passed by, that he sees God already passed, "*for My face shall not be seen.*"

Can we recognise in these various elements of religious experience anything which we might expect to meet with to-day? Surely we may. Let us take them one by one.

That man can, and does, speak to God, and hear His answer, needs no proof. Saints in every age bear witness to this experience as the most vital in their lives. But one example I may give. A young officer in the Flying Corps once said to me "I suppose we all know what it is to go on our knees to pray for something we intensely desire, and to rise from our knees quite content not to have it." Yes, that is an experience which if not all, at any rate very many people, have had. But how would it be possible unless the person who prayed had heard God saying: "That I cannot grant. Trust Me; it is better for you not to have it," or unless He had shewed His child some better object of desire? If prayer is not real communion with God, real intercourse involving listening to His voice as well as speaking to Him, it is nothing.

And as there is no need to labour the point that we can both speak to God and also hear Him answering, so there is little need to shew by examples drawn either from history or daily life, that men seeking to God in times of

anxiety and of stress do find Him always quick to answer "My presence shall go with thee and I will give thee rest." When a friend asked General Gordon if he were not afraid to go all alone to China, where he did the great work which earned him his title of "Chinese Gordon," he replied, "But I am not going alone. My Saviour will go with me." And Marshall Foch, insisting on time for attendance at his Mass, in the most critical days of the war, and Lord Kitchener, turning into a London church for a short time for quiet prayer on his way daily to the War Office, are examples of men who, feeling the strain and the burden, cried to God "If Thy presence go not with us carry us not up hence."

But what shall we say of the second element we noted, of the sense of God's individual knowledge of, and love for, the soul? Rightly understood this is, I believe, one of the most fundamental experiences of religion, and one of the most universal. Let me take an example. I was speaking to one of my lads of the dreadful experience of a chaplain whose first duty in France was to prepare for death a young soldier who was to be shot for cowardice. My friend said "I can understand it. I once nearly gave way to panic myself. I'd been under bombardment once or twice myself and come through all right. And then one day I had a panic. It's no good my trying to explain to you what I felt, for no one can know till he has experienced it. And then, all of a sudden, when in another moment I should have thrown away my rifle and run, it passed. Suddenly I knew—no, I did not *think*, you can't think at a time like that; I just *knew*—that God had His eye on me, and that if I were blown to atoms that moment it would

not matter. God seemed to say to me ' Out of all the millions fighting on all the fronts I have My eye on you, and if you die this minute it won't matter ; I shall take care of you.' After that I often felt afraid, but I never felt in a panic. I did not want to be hit in a painful place, and I did not want to be a cripple. Above all I did not want to be blinded. But I was never in a panic again." I asked him if he had ever had the same experience again. He just smiled and said " No ! never again. But once is enough. You don't need that sort of thing often. I might grow careless and bad ; though I hope I won't. But I could never say, as some chaps do, that there is no God. Because you see I know different."

Surely this lad's experience was absolutely identical with that of Moses. I say absolutely identical for under all differences of form and manner we can recognise the identity of what is essential. In the crisis of his life the young soldier, like the great leader of God's chosen people, heard God saying " I know thee by name and thou hast also found grace in My sight." That is to say he realized God's interest in him personally, as one individual clearly seen and known among all the other millions of God's children. And as he realized God's interest in him personally, so too he knew that that interest was a loving interest and that he, sinful and imperfect as he was, had yet found grace in God's sight.

But are not these two elements the most fundamental in all religious experience. Reasoning, so to speak, *a priori*, we should expect that if and when a man has actual first-hand experience of God, Infinite, Omnipotent, Holy, his chief feelings would be of his own utter

insignificance in the eyes of God, and of God's wrath at his sinfulness. The exact opposite is the truth. As soon as a man knows God he knows Him for what He is, and cries "Behold the heaven of heavens cannot contain thee"¹ and asks in amazement, as he realizes God's greatness and his own nothingness "What is man, that Thou art mindful of him, and the son of man that Thou visitest him?"² But over and above this feeling, transcending it and as it were swallowing it up, is a sense of his own value in the eyes of God, not because of his own worth but because of the goodness of God, and because of His nature, which is Love. At his call Jeremiah hears God say "Before I formed thee in the belly I knew thee, and before thou camest forth out of the womb I sanctified thee"³ S. Paul knows that during the years before he met his Master on the road to Damascus God had marked him for His own and had "separated me from my mother's womb"⁴ for his life's task of preaching the gospel. S. John knows that God's intimate and personal love for us is earlier than our love for Him and the cause of it, "we love Him because he first loved us."⁵ And we all know, and must surely love, the supreme expression of this personal relationship of God to the soul given in the 139th psalm.

But the religious experience of the saints in all ages does not only witness to the intimate and personal nature of God's knowledge of each one of us. It witnesses also the fact that God's interest is a loving one. If it is true, as we have seen that it is, that the experience of God, instead of oppressing us with a sense of our

¹ 1 Kings viii. 27.

² Ps. viii. 4.

³ Jeremiah i. 5.

⁴ Gal. i. 15.

⁵ 1 St. John iv. 19.

worthlessness and insignificance in His eyes, lifts us up with a sense that He knows us by name, it is equally true that knowing God we know Him as a God of Love, not as One of wrath and anger. I would not deny for a moment, rather I would strongly assert, that to know God is to learn one's own unworthiness. When Isaiah sees God he cries. "Woe in me! for I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips."¹ Job sees God and says "I have heard of Thee by the hearing of the ear; but now mine eye seeth Thee. Wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes."² S. Peter knows Jesus as God and is driven to his knees, calling out "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord."³ Conviction of sin is a natural, one might say an inevitable result of a real knowledge of God. But it must be noticed that in all the passages we have quoted, and doubtless in many other passages which we might have quoted from the Bible, and from other literature, what is expressed in a sense of personal sinfulness and unworthiness, not a sense of God's anger and wrath. Rather, as we have seen, this sense of personal sinfulness is transcended and swallowed up by a sense of God's loving mercy and favour. If you really and truly hear God speaking to you at all you will hear Him saying "Thou hast found grace in my sight," or even better still "Thou art My beloved child in whom I am well pleased."⁴

One of the earliest pieces of religious experience ever brought to my notice illustrates this. When I was at Cambridge a working lad in my Bible Class told me how,

¹ Isaiah vi. 5.

³ S. Luke v. 8.

² Job. xlii. 6.

⁴ S. Matt iii. 17.

when he was about sixteen and a half, he had felt disinclined, one Sunday morning, to go to Sunday School, and so had gone and sat on a bench on Midsummer Common. "And suddenly" he said "God was all round me. Just sweetness and light. And life has never been quite the same since." This is a specially interesting experience, not only because of the lad's simplicity, and of the fact that he had read no mystical literature and so could not have been even unconsciously repeating another's experience, but because of the reference to light. It would be a profitable exercise for the reader to collect, from the Old and New Testament, and if possible from religious biographies and books of first hand mystical experience, and from the experience of friends, examples of visions and revelations of God, and to note how universally they are accompanied by the sensation of light. But more vitally important is the experience of God as "sweetness." I do not believe that it is possible to argue, from the beauty and marvellousness of nature, that God is good. "Nature red in tooth and claw" is quite compatible with a god of cruelty and malice. I do, on the other hand, believe that we can find, in moral and practical experience, good reasons for believing, though not perhaps conclusive proof, that "God is Love." But the real ground for that faith is experience. Those who feel the sun's rays find them warm. Those who know God find Him good, experience Him to be Love, enjoy Him as 'sweetness and light.' That "God is Love" is a proposition established by the experience of those who know Him.

I shall try, in the next two chapters, to examine other

forms of religious experience, and to draw out their lessons for our own personal religion. In so doing we shall, I hope, find what lessons we are to learn from the third and fourth elements of religious experience noted above in connection with Moses' vision. We shall, that is to say, find why, when Moses would have seen God's "glory," he was shewn His "goodness," and what is the meaning of the shadowing by God's hand in the cleft of the rock. Here let us just sum up the lessons of this chapter. They are two.

Firstly, think nobly of your soul, and of its value. If you are worth God's care, and unwearying attention and watchfulness, you are of infinite value. This thought will not lead you to conceit. Rather it will lead you to true Christian humility, for it will constantly bring before you the gulf between what you are and what God desires you to be and means to make you.

And secondly, never doubt God's love and patience. It is quite certain that no earthly friend thinks as highly of you as God does, nor has such a high ideal for you or such faith in your power to attain to it. Here again we need not fear that this thought will lead us to presume on God's love. Rather it will spur us on to become less unworthy of it.

CHAPTER V

VARIETIES OF RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCES—(II) MORAL.

IN the last chapter we considered some examples of religious experience of the mystical kind, and saw that men and women of to-day are as open to God's direct revelation of Himself as they were in Bible times. And I would repeat, what I have already said, that such mystical experiences are very much commoner than most people suppose. Our national reticence on religion and a natural and commendable unwillingness to speak to all and sundry of our deepest soul's experiences—to talk of which in mixed company, and before unsympathetic and perhaps sceptical persons, is a true casting of pearls before swine—and an unnatural and far from commendable faithlessness which often leads people, when the "times of refreshing . . . from the presence of the Lord"¹ are passed, to look on them as a delusion, and to regard spiritual deadness and coldness as their true and *natural* state—as if, when a cloud passes over the sun I should deny that there really was any sun in the heavens at all, and declare that my experience of its warmth and light was a mere delusion—all these things combine to make people believe true mystical experience of God to be a fruit of hysteria and self deception, or at any rate a very rare and exceptional thing granted to very few of God's greatest saints. But indeed direct personal experiences

¹ Acts iii. 19.

of God, accompanied sometimes, but not always, by sensations of light, of intense happiness and joy, and of voices heard or visions seen, are very far from uncommon. A good number of years ago I said, when writing of the things described in the Bible narratives, that I divided them into four classes as follows :

(i) Those things of which I could say " I know this is true, for God has treated me in the same way."

(ii) Those of which I could say, " I know this is true, for though I personally have never had such an experience I know people who have."

(iii) Those of which I could say " I believe this to be true, for though I have never met with such a case I know enough of human nature, and of God's ways with man, to see that it is natural and suitable. "

(iv) Those things of which I had to say " This I do not understand. It corresponds with nothing in my own experience, or the experience of those I have talked with."

Now after a good number of years of Bible study, and of efforts to understand God's dealings with man, and after many open hearted talks on religion with men and women of all classes, and in all stages of religious development, I am more than ever convinced that there is no religious experience described in Holy Scripture which cannot be paralleled by something similar to-day. Many things in the Bible which I should once have had to put in class ii or iii, or even in class iv, as described above, I can now put in class i, as something that I can match in my own life. I say " many things ;" not of course all, for the Bible is the record of the religious experience of a whole nation, and that the nation most

richly endowed with religious genius of any in the world. No single individual's religious life can be as full and deep, and broad, as that of a nation. But by drawing as freely as possible on what others have told me the number of things in Holy Scripture of which I have to say: "This is a sealed book to me; I do not know what this means," has greatly decreased and of many other things, of which I used once to say merely that I could see them to be possible, I can now say that I know them to be true since I have met similar examples of God's dealings with souls in my own circle of friends and acquaintances.

Now this is evidently a great help to faith. Often when young people speak to me of having "lost faith in religion" I feel inclined to say: "Oh! nonsense. You have not lost faith. How can you lose what you never had? You have no religious experience. You have never taken any real interest in your own soul, or in anything but the mere externals of religion. Be humble. Be patient. Try to be good. Wait upon the Lord. When you have one grain of real first hand religious experience to rest on we shall hear no more of losing faith in religion. And, since 'to everyone that hath, shall be given, and he shall have abundance'¹ where you have a grain of religious experience you will soon have more and more till you too have abundance."

How then may the reader increase his or her stores of true religious experience? I am quite certain that the first and most indispensable thing is the study of Holy Scripture. I do not believe there is anything, no not even the neglect of private prayer, or of public worship,

¹ S. Matt. xxv. 29.

which has done, and is doing, so much harm to religion in England to-day, as the neglect of Bible reading. The doctor who desires to recognise various diseases when he sees them, and to disagnose his patients' complaints correctly, must first "walk the hospitals," and study many examples of each disease in the wards. The naturalist, whether botanist, zoologist or geologist, who would recognise the various types and genera he studies, must first read of them in text books, and examine them on the shelves of museums. For the student of religion the Bible is the great text-book and museum and picture gallery combined, where he may study examples of God's dealings with souls and of the soul's reaction to God's treatment. It is no use reading the Bible in a hurry. It must be read slowly, and thought over, and prayed about. It is no use expecting to get the spiritual value till we know the facts and are familiar with the characters and incidents. It is no use resting satisfied with the mere details of the story; we must go on and ask what is the spiritual lesson to be learned, and the spiritual truth which the story illustrates. And even this is not enough. When we have learned the lesson any passage teaches us we must try to find illustratious of the same truth in our daily life, in ourselves or our friends.

Now of mystical experience of God, such as we considered in the last chapter, there are two or three very important things to be said. They are so vitally important that I will treat them in detail.

(i) *They must never be sought.* It is not for us to rush into God's presence, but for Him to come to us, when He sees fit. Our part is to wait upon God. To

try and attain to direct experience of God by means of worked up feelings and excited emotions is to court disappointment and disillusionment, if not something worse. All notable revelations come suddenly, unexpectedly, unsought. One of the most remarkable, and I believe one of the most valuable, experiences of which I have any record was described by the man to whom it was granted in a letter to his mother. He laid great stress on the fact that he was in no way "worked up" at the time, nor was he feeling in anyway different from what he usually did, nor was he expecting or asking for any special revelation. "I was just praying quietly in church," he wrote, "and all of a sudden it happened." And he went on to say that he was so afraid of self deception that he waited six months before writing about it to his mother, to see, as he said, if it bore fruits of righteousness in life, and was in that way shewn to be genuine and sent from God.

(ii) *They are no proofs of special holiness.* In every age wise directors of the souls of others have recognised that if such special revelations and mystical experiences are a great privilege they are also a great responsibility and may be a great danger. They are no proof of special holiness. Indeed it is quite possible that in some cases they are God's method of awakening, from the torpor of sin and sloth, souls deaf to the more quiet voice of conscience. And at any rate there is no room for glorying. Such things should be spoken of only to a few, and to wise councillors, and with humility. And as there must be no effort to attain such experiences, so there must be no effort to re-engage them, and no surprise or disillusionment if the vision passes not to be

repeated. As the young soldier, mentioned in the last chapter, said "Once is enough. You don't need that sort of thing often." Yet while we make no effort to re-engage these times of enlightenment—since God will grant them again if He sees fit, and if He does not so see fit we can gain nothing by going contrary to His will—yet we do well constantly to recall past blessings to memory. For we may truly say "The merciful and gracious Lord has so done His marvellous works, that they ought to be had in remembrance." ¹

(iii) *No one need be depressed at not having such experiences.* Some people, reading of remarkable religious experiences, are depressed and disheartened because they have not themselves experienced any such. But there is no need for such depression, and that for two reasons. Firstly, God may still have such things in reserve for you. They do not happen often in anyone's life; perhaps not more than once in the case of most people. And they come as often in old age as in middle age, and more often in either than in youth. So for any soul they may still be to come. And secondly, they are quite certainly not universal and possibly quite exceptional. What I mean is that there are certainly some and possibly many persons who cannot have these experiences. This is denied by some writers on mysticism. They say that all souls must possess the power of direct experience of God, and that therefore all souls are capable of mystical experience of God. I do not think so. I am sure all souls will have direct experience of God *either in this life or hereafter*. And I am sure that, even in this life, all souls can truly know God.

¹ Ps. cxi. 4

But I do not believe that that direct open-eyed experience of God which I have called mystical experience, and which expresses itself in visions, voices, and revelations is granted to all, though I believe that many who might enjoy it do not now do so because their souls are not enlightened, but "are choked with cares and riches and pleasures of this life."¹

So then any of us who have never been granted any special mystical experiences need not trouble. If they are good for us God will grant them to us when we are fit to receive them. And if they are not good for us we need not desire them. One thing we can do. We can strive to become fit, and to see that no cloud of wilful and unrepented sin hinders the time when "the day shall dawn and the day star arise in your hearts."²

And that last thought leads us to what is the real topic of this chapter. There is a way to the knowledge of God which is sure, direct, and open to all, and which we not only may, but are in duty bound, to seek. It is the way of morality. Do you want an immediate, direct and certain proof that God is Holy? Try to pray when you are full of angry, selfish, impure, or revengeful thoughts and you will prove for yourself the truth of the psalmist's words "If I incline unto wickedness with mine heart, the Lord will not hear me."³ It is one of the most real, vivid, and indisputable pieces of religious experience, and one, alas, which we have all had. Sin in the heart cuts us off from God as if a great iron curtain had fallen between us and Him. And if we have had past experience of the power of

¹ St. Luke viii. 14.

² 2 Peter i. 19.

³ Ps. lxvi. 16.

prayer, so that we can go on, as the psalmist does, and say: "But God hath heard me, and considered the voice of my prayer. Praised be God Who hath not cast out my prayer nor turned His mercy from me," we shall find this sad power of sin in the heart to cut us off from God a very certain proof at once of His reality and of His holiness.

But we can have a happy and positive, as well as a sad and negative proof of God's holiness. Here is a lovely story. A tram conductor was once giving an address at a religious meeting for the tramway men of a neighbouring town. He explained that his parents had allowed him to grow up without any religious teaching at church or chapel, that he had attended no Sunday School, and was a man of no education. "But one thing, brothers, I can say to you. Try being kind and gentle, and patient to the old woman who digs you in the ribs three times in five minutes and says 'Have we passed John Street' and see what it does for the sweetness and quiet of your own soul." This man had proved for himself, by first-hand experience, the truth of the words of S. John that "God is love, and he that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, and God in him."¹ And we can all prove this for ourselves, and learn by daily experience—experience that "love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, meekness, faith and self restraint,"² are not only the fruit of the Spirit, but the means which God has put in our own hands of bringing Him into our hearts.

Nor is it only our affections which are warmed and

¹ 1 S. John iv. 16.

² Gal. v. 23.

stirred, and our wills which are braced and strengthened by efforts after a holy life. Nothing enlightens the intellect and clears away religious doubts and difficulties so surely as holy living. It is a pity that a poor translation conceals from many readers the true meaning of our Saviour's words in S. John vii. 17. It should read: "If any man willeth (*i.e.* makes up his mind, and sets his will) to do His will he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God." This great truth cannot be too much insisted on. I do not say that all unbelief has its roots in moral evil. No indeed! Many moral and nobly living men are sceptics owing to ignorance, faults in their upbringing, the ill example of professing Christians, and other causes. But I do assert, for I have many times found it to be true, that a bad life is a very frequent, and quite sufficient, cause of unbelief. And I do also assert, for that too I have many times found to be true, that there is no surer or more certain path to a firm and assured faith, and to such knowledge of "the doctrine" as convinces us that it is "of God" than a steady and sustained effort after goodness.

So if you desire to make progress in your own personal religion do not trouble yourself about visions, revelations, and mystical experiences. These will come if God sees fit, and are most likely to come where you are morally fit for them. But do set your heart to do His will for there is no more certain path to the knowledge of God than a "patient continuance in well doing"¹ and the way of morality is a path to the feet of God which lies open to all of us.

¹ Rom. ii. 7.

CHAPTER VI

VARIETIES OF RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCE—(III) PRACTICAL

IN the last chapter we considered that path to the knowledge of God which is offered by what we call morality ; by an effort, that is to say, to realize holiness in ordinary daily life. And we recognised two things, firstly that wilful sin bars the way to God, so that “ if I incline unto wickedness with my heart the Lord will not hear me,” and secondly that a strict and holy life is a means to the knowledge of God and of religious truth, so that “ if any man willeth to do His will, he shall know of the doctrine whether it be of God.”

Now having discussed these subjects many times with many people, I know that both these truths are often denied. Let us consider the first assertion, that sin cuts us off from God. Any priest who is accustomed to hear confessions will be told, from time to time, by some penitent : “ Though I have fallen back into sin so many times since my last confession, yet I think I have made some progress in other ways. Between my falls I have prayed earnestly and with happiness, and God has never seemed so real and religion so helpful.” Now of course *there may be cases* where an earnest effort is being made to cure some long standing fault of character, and to break the chain of past sin, and where, in spite of occasional failures, real progress is being made and where therefore, in the intervals between defeats, God may indeed be a reality to the soul, and religion

a help. But *generally speaking* the state of things described above, in which frequent and recurrent sin has little or no effect to choke prayer, or spoil the joy of religion, is a most deadly and dangerous one. It means that, in some particular, the soul has made a truce with Satan, and has said, more or less consciously, "In all else I will serve God, but in *this sin* I will allow myself." But that line of conduct, if persisted in, always leads to the total ruin of a soul, and often to some dreadful public collapse which makes men say: "How could so good and great a man, who spoke so nobly for his Master, and knew so much of the deep things of the spiritual life, have come to such a pass? Was it hypocrisy all the time?" The answer is that it was not hypocrisy, if by that is meant the conscious playing of a part, and pretending what was not really meant or felt. No; the dreadful thing was that, in the intervals between the falls, the man was wholly in earnest, "God a reality and religion helpful." Ask yourself earnestly whether your sins have ceased to hinder your religion. And if you are bound to answer that it is so, then be horribly afraid. For be sure of this that if your sins have ceased to hinder your religion, then your religion has ceased to hinder your sins. And that is the surest sign of a soul already "dead in trespasses and sins"¹ or at best in mortal peril.

So we may conclude that it is true that sin always cuts us off from communion with God, and that in those cases where it seems not to have this effect there is the more cause for fear.

The second objection is far more commonly made.

¹ Eph. ii. 1.

People say that a good life cannot be a path to the knowledge of God since many of the noblest and best men and women of their acquaintance have no religious faith of any kind. Now this argument is so frequently used, and does so much to encourage many people, especially young men and women, to think religion a thing of no value, producing no valuable fruits, that it is well worth examining. And I would very earnestly beg my readers to deal honestly with themselves and not to be content with vague generalities, and hasty assertions. Are the best and noblest men and women you know without religious beliefs? Are they really? Would you be prepared to take a piece of paper and pencil and write down a list of those you have really most loved and honoured, and then to mark with a cross those who had a vital religion of their own, and with an asterisk those who had none? Try it. I will speak for myself. My father, my mother, my old headmaster, two of my other masters who left their mark deep upon me, my first vicar at the church where I was brought up, several of my teachers at Cambridge, many scores of plain men and women, known and honoured and loved in the various churches where I have worked, men and women met in daily life in London and Leeds and Manchester, these pass before my mind's eye as I write, an exceeding great army. And in each and all burned the fire of a vivid personal religion. I do not want to suggest for a moment that all church and chapel going folk are perfect. The Christianity of some (not of as many as the world likes to pretend, yet certainly of some) is merely nominal. I do not mean to deny that I have met men of noble life without religious faith,

though they have been much fewer than one would suppose from the way in which many people talk. But when I sit down, in a quiet hour, to weigh and estimate what I have seen and known of men and women I can say, with no uncertain voice, that even here and now God is already "glorified in His saints"¹ and religious faith justified by its fruits. This is certainly not because I do not know now, and have not known in the past, plenty of people without religious faith. There was perhaps no time in which Robert Browning's cry,

" How hard a thing it is to be
A Christian. Hard for you and me,"

was more true than in the last quarter of the nineteenth century when the dogmatic materialism of Huxley and Tyndale ruled most minds. And at college, and since, I have known many men whose religion gave way under the strain which the new knowledge in physical science, historical research, and biblical criticism, seemed to lay upon it. But I have never known a man who did not seem to me to suffer grievous loss in surrendering his faith. And as for the statement, so commonly made in newspapers to-day, that those who follow up their religion are certainly no better and quite possibly worse, less brave, less manly, less unselfish, less kindly, less truly and essentially Christ-like, than men and women of the world who make no effort to seek God, the statement seems to me to be a silly delusion fathered by Satan, the Father of lies, repeated by the papers because it is popular with the men and women whose vanity it flatters, and welcomed by people whom it

¹ 2 Thess. i. 10.

encourages in their disinclination to face the hardships and privations of discipleship to One Who said: "If any man will come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me."¹

At any rate let us have no hypocrisy. If anyone really and truly believes that an earnest effort after the knowledge and love of God, and a strenuous endeavour after the holiness "without which no man shall see the Lord"² yields no fruit and that those who are without religion are as good, or better, than those with it, then let him cease wasting his time with religion at all. If he is right it is not worth bothering with. But if, on careful and earnest reflection, a man is bound to admit that where there is a real vital religion there is nobility of character, and a power in the lives of others, and an attractive force which is found nowhere else, and a vision of God which brings Heaven down to earth, and a foretaste of life eternal, then let him guard his tongue and not give support to this silly—and if rightly understood blasphemous—depreciation of true religion, and praise of godlessness. For by it many are encouraged to go on living without God, and many of His "little ones" are offended and caused to stumble.

For my own part I have never seen any occasion to regret an answer I once gave to a question flung at me at a dinner-hour service outside a mill in Burnley. A workingman shouted out to me, as I was preaching during one of the Open-Air Services of a Ten Day Mission, "Governor, will you give us one plain reason why you believe in religion?" I had never had it put

¹ S. Luke ix. 23.

² Heb. xii. 14.

to me quite like that before, but I was in no doubt as to my answer. Indeed I do truly believe that there, and for me, were fulfilled Christ's words of promise, "It shall be given you, in that same hour, what ye shall speak."¹ At any rate I replied at once: "Aye I will. I believe in Christianity because I find it suits boys and girls." And I went on to point out that they believed the same and that many of them, like many of the parents in my own parish, while neglecting religion themselves were yet anxious that their boys and girls should stick to church and Sunday School, and follow up their religion, because, as they themselves would say, "I want our John Willie" or "I want our Lizzie Ann to grow up good." It is a plain fact of experience, verified daily for those who keep their eyes open and are interested in such things, that boys and girls who really try to practice their religion, do indeed increase "in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and man."² And the opposite is equally true. During the last twenty years I have been appealed to, again and again, by parents in every walk in life from the richest to the poorest, with the request that I would "speak to" some young man or young woman who was causing anxiety to relations and friends. And in the vast majority of cases I have found that there has been no religion in the life of the boy or girl. I wonder how many times I have been told, in answer to some question of mine, "I believe he was confirmed at school. I know his House Master wrote about it. But his father has always been so much against religion, and it made so much unpleasantness at home, that I am afraid he

¹ S. Matt. x. 19.

² S. Luke ii. 52.

has never gone to church much in the holidays. But we are both so anxious about him now I am sure his father would not mind if you could get the boy interested in church." This is the practical proof of the truth of religion, namely that it works. Of course an unwise insistence on religion with young people, and a clumsy or unloving presentation of it to them, will alienate some of them. And since we all have free will, and some men use that free will to chose evil and not good, the wisest and most loving parents may fail to make their children love God, even as our Wise and Loving Father is not successful with all His children. But speaking generally wisdom is justified of her children and the best proof of the truth of religion is the lives of those who love the Lord. I am quite prepared to throw down this challenge to the world, and to let Christianity stand or fall by its fruits. Indeed when I consider the characters of many plain men and women, boys and girls, who in dull lives of hard work and small pay and scant pleasure, live for God and to serve others, I ask myself what must be the beauty of God Himself when the reflexion of His glory in the faces of his children is so fair. It ought not to be difficult to believe in religion when we are "compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses."¹ If you love goodness, and have a quick eye for the beauty of holiness, you need not lack proofs of the power of the Holy Spirit in the lives of men.

And as in men, so in nations. I do not pretend that it is easy for plain men and women to understand God's workings in history or to interpret His dealings with the nations. It requires wide reading in secular history,

¹ Heb. xii. 1.

and a mind soaked in the teachings of the Bible, and true humility, and some portion of the prophetic spirit, before we can begin to trace God's hand in the course of current politics and the march of contemporary events, and to see His judgments and His rewards. But I am sure we can soon learn enough to recognise the truth of the words "Righteousness exalteth a nation."¹ And a deep and ever deepening conviction of the reality of God's providence is at once a wonderful support to faith, and one of its most precious fruits.

There is, however, one history in which it is quite easy to trace God's hand at work, if we approach the task in the right spirit. I mean in a man's own history ; in his own life. I have left this till the last in describing the evidence—mystical, moral and practical—which we may discover for the truth of our religion, because it is a kind of evidence not available before middle age. A good piece of the cloth of a man's life must be already woven on God's loom before the pattern can be plainly seen. But a man of five and thirty or forty ought to begin to see clearly the proofs of God's providence in his life, and every additional year ought to make those proofs more clear. In this connection I would quote the words which an old man, well over eighty, spoke to me a few days before his death. He said : " You know what my life has been. All my life I've been a poor man, and all my life I've been a delicate man. Often I've looked ahead and wondered how I was going to earn enough to bring up my children and to pay my way. But looking back I can see how, at every turning, God was waiting for me with a miracle. I can say, if any man

¹ Proverbs xiv. 34.

can ' Surely goodness and mercy have followed me all the days of my life.' " ¹

And here, I think, we find at last the meaning of two elements of Moses' vision mentioned in Chapter IV. We desire to see God's glory. We want to see His cause openly and gloriously vindicated, and evil confounded. But we do not. No sudden and startling judgment upholds the righteous, and puts God's enemies to shame. But quietly and in secret He makes all His goodness pass before us so that, at the end of a life which seems to have been hard and unsuccessful, and of which, speaking only of outward things, we may say " few and evil have the days of the years of my life been " ² we may yet say, speaking of inward things, and of the life of the soul " I am not worthy of the least of all the mercies and of all the truth which Thou has shewed unto Thy servant." ³

Nor need we look far for an interpretation of the darkness of the cleft in the rock, and of God's shadowing hand. Often in times of bereavement, or of severe pain, or, even more, of prolonged bodily weakness, it is very hard to feel the consolations of religion. But when such times are over we look back and know that they were times when, in truth, God was very near us, " passing by," covering us with His hand. This interpretation of the passage (and I mention the fact not with any foolish desire to claim originality, but to prove that the interpretation is no fanciful one, but has occurred to more than one person) had been my

¹ Ps. xxiii. 6. Bible Version.

² Gen. xlvii. 9.

³ Gen. xxxii. 10.

own, and used by me in sermons, before I found it expressed in Francis Thompson's poem *The Hound of Heaven*.

“Is my gloom, after all
Shade of His hand, outstretched caressingly?”

CHAPTER VII

THE WORLD'S NEED OF GOD

THE line of thought which we have been pursuing in these pages so far should now be fairly clear. We started with the conviction that man is made for God, and for communion with God. "There is nothing so native to man as God, nor anywhere where he is so completely at home"; "For in Him we live, and move, and have our being."¹ Life apart from and without God is as unnatural to man as a life out of water is to a fish. Hence all our efforts to do good to others while we ourselves are trying to live without God are bound to be utterly fruitless. What the world needs to-day is God. Whether men realize it or not what the individual, and the city, and the nation, and Europe, and the whole world, cries out for to-day is God. God as the life of the individual soul; God as the power in which all tasks are to be fulfilled; God as the wisdom in the light of which our moral, social, industrial, and international problems are to be solved; God as Alpha and Omega, the source and the end of all things; it is God that man needs and desires unconsciously even when he sees Him not, and loves with a consuming love when once He is even dimly seen. Hence a man's first and highest duty is to seek God, and the most truly *social* thing he can do is to be truly religious, and his most unselfish work is the care of his

¹ Acts xvii. 28.

own soul. And all suggestions to the contrary, all claims that a man ought to forget his own soul and try to do some good in the world are nonsense, at once arrogant and profane, and are based on total ignorance of man's nature. For man is nothing, and can do nothing, apart from God.

But while we recognised this truth, that our neighbours want God not us, and that if we are to help them it must be by means not of our own abilities, powers, energy, zeal, eloquence, or charm, but by just so much of God as is in us, we went on to recognise the second truth namely that religion—and by religion I mean the knowledge and love of God, and a partaking of His life—is not given to us for ourselves but for others. If we are to *share* God's life we must *live* God's life, and God's life is a life of love, a life of service, a life of giving, of spending and being spent in the service of others. So much of the life of God as is in you can only be kept by being given away, only increased by being freely, even recklessly, spent. In spiritual things squandering is the best hoarding; and of the life of the soul, which is God's life in you, Jesus has said: "Whosoever will save his life shall lose it; but whosoever shall lose his life, for My sake and the gospel's, the same shall save it."¹ And these are neither Eastern paradoxes, nor pious platitudes, but statements at once profoundly true and absolutely simple and obvious, of man's true nature, and can be verified by any boy or girl between breakfast and lunch.

So then men's true nature is to draw in life from moment to moment from God, as a fountain draws

¹ S. Mark viii. 35.

its water from some deep lying inexhaustible reservoir in the eternal hills, and then to pour out that life again in service to others, as the fountain pours out its waters to refresh and quicken men and animals and the parched earth.

But obviously what we give out must be real. A merely second-hand religion, knowledge not *of God* but merely *about God*, will have little power in our own lives and none in the lives of others. So in the 4th, 5th and 6th chapters we considered the three types of religious experience by which men come to a vital religion, namely mystical experience, which God grants to some souls and is perhaps willing to grant to all who wait upon Him, and moral experience, which is a way open to all of us and to which indeed we are imperiously called, and practical experience which we may gather from our own lives, or from that of others, or from history. I have often thought that the New Testament gives us, in the four gospels and in the epistles of S. Paul, examples of these various types of experience. S. John is the pure mystic, who declares unto us that "God is Love" ¹ and also that "God is Light, and in Him is no darkness at all." ² And S. Paul, rich also in mystical experience of rather a different type, is the supreme example of the moral experience of God. His power to say, "for to me to live is Christ and to die is gain," ³ brings rest to his "long divided heart" and unifies and harmonises all the riches and powers of that marvellous personality. S. Luke, if I have read aright the life of the "beloved physician" who, after tasting all the bitterness of a slave's lot, and all the sin of a

¹ 1 S. John iv. 16.

² S. John i. 5.

³ Phil. i. 21.

corrupt world, found in Christ one Who was "anointed to preach the gospel to the poor, . . . to heal the broken hearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised, to preach the acceptable year of the Lord," is an example of those whose conversion is a release from the bitterness and misery of sin, and so a proof both moral and practical of the power of Christ to save. S. Matthew is surely a perfect example of the man who can read the proofs of God's providence in history and in contemporary politics. Steeped in the teaching of the Old Testament he asks where are God's mercies to Israel, where the fulfilment of His promises to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. We can fancy him crying, with the psalmist, "Hath God forgotten to be gracious" and asking in bitterness of soul "Is His promise come utterly to an end for evermore?"¹ Only from Christ does he learn the true interpretation of history, and come to see that the kingdom which God promised to Israel is no mere earthly kingdom at Jerusalem, but a kingdom of Heaven. And from that moment all his difficulties vanish, and life is not long enough for him to shew his gratitude to God by pointing out how "all this was done that it might be fulfilled which was spoken of the Lord by the prophet"² and by proclaiming how completely God's promises have been, and are being, fulfilled. He seems to say, again and again, "See how it all fits in. See what supports for faith are here. How can any man doubt when God's hand is so clearly displayed in history, and his providence vindicated among the nations." And finally we may see

¹ Ps. lxxvii. 9 and v. 8.

² S. Matt. i. 22.

in St. Peter—for St. Mark is only St. Peter's mouthpiece—a man who, himself rich in mystical and moral experience, can yet appeal, in his Gospel, and in his speeches in the Acts, and in his epistles, to the plain man, with the plain man's argument that the religion of Jesus Christ, "Who went about doing good, and healing all that were oppressed of the Devil, for God was with Him,"¹ is a religion that works, that has power against "fleshly lusts which war against the soul"² and makes us to have "compassion one of another to love as brethren, to be pitiful and courteous."³ No doubt it would not be wise to press the differences between the sacred writers too far. All different types of religious experience, as we have said, shade off one into the other, and the great saints doubtless had very wide and full experiences. But at any rate they all combine to bear witness to the truth that there are many roads to the feet of God and that visions and revelations, struggles against sin and efforts after holiness, the experiences of daily life and the witness of history all lead us to the knowledge and love of God Who is found in all these various ways, yet always found to be One and the Same, the perfection of Wisdom Truth and Beauty, perfect Power and perfect Love.

And so the first duty of every man and woman is to seek to know God. A true religion is the first thing needed. Till you have that you have nothing to give that any man needs. Till you are yourself in living touch with God you can no more help others than a man carrying a dry and dusty watering pot can give others drink. If I seem to insist on this with wearisome

¹ Acts x. 38.

² 1 S. Peter ii. 11.

³ 1 S. Peter iii. 8.

iteration I will ask my readers to forgive me. But I cannot do otherwise. For I am deeply persuaded that the world to-day needs the lesson of Christ's word "Without Me ye can do nothing."¹ Do we not see proofs of this powerlessness on every side? Is not the whole world a proof of man's inability by himself to realize the good he desires?

We all hate and dread war. It would probably be impossible to find a man anywhere to-day who would not declare it to be an unmixed evil, a frantic mixture of wickedness and folly. The clearest sighted men believe that our whole Western Civilization may yet crash as the result of the last war, and that a second European war must inevitably mean the total ruin of our race, perhaps for centuries. Yet we seem to be drifting daily into war. Why? Why cannot our statesmen save us?

We all are alive to the evils of our modern civilization. Many view the present state of industrial anarchy, in which competition, run mad, destroys most of what is beautiful and gracious in the lives of rich and poor alike, as necessary and unavoidable. Nobody denies that it is cruel, wasteful, ugly, and unchristian. And many millions rebel again it with heart and soul, and would make any sacrifice for the bringing in of a better world-order. Yet we seem powerless to break the chains that bind us, or to escape from the tyranny of a system which seems to offer as little that is worth having to those who win as to those who lose. Why? Why cannot our economists and social philosophers help us?

¹ S. John xv. 5.

There has, perhaps, never been a time when men and women have so desired happiness, and consciously set it before them as something which is their right to attain to, and to enjoy. And yet the "happy ending" in novels, indeed the novel which paints life as a good, rich, full, and desirable thing, is quite out of favour. I do not say, of course, that contemporary fiction gives an accurate picture of life. Heaven forbid. But the books written by the most articulate class among us, and greedily devoured by what are presumably the most intelligent classes, must afford some indication of what men and women are thinking. And especially one would expect this to be true in respect of the thing which occupies so much of people's thoughts and conversation, namely married life. I think there can never have been a time when there was more time and thought devoted to the discussion of what married life should be. No, nor any time when the ideal of perfect comradeship between husband and wife was more beautifully conceived, or the "marriage of true minds" more highly valued. Yet the novels that attract most attention, sell best, are almost exclusively those which treat of incompatibility in marriage, and most novels, instead of ending "and they married and lived happy ever after" might well end "and they married and immediately began to be miserable." I do not, of course, mean that novels give a fair picture of life in this respect, still less do I mean to deny that there are many happy marriages and happy homes. But it does seem to me that the world has here an ideal which it is largely unable to attain to.

And the same may be said in the religious sphere.

Never before has there been a deeper or more widespread sense of the harm done by "our unhappy divisions." Men and women of all denominations realize, as perhaps never before, what an insult to God, and hindrance to religion, and scandal to the world, is afforded by the spectacle of rival denominations each more careful for its own interests than for those of the Kingdom of Heaven, and each more hostile to the others than to infidelity and sin. And yet every effort after re-union does but make more clear the indifference of the rank and file at once in church and chapel to the call for unity and the unwillingness—perhaps we ought to say the conscientious inability—of the best and most earnest Christians to make any real sacrifices to attain the fulfilment of our Blessed Lord's prayer "that they may be one." ¹

In all these things goodwill is not lacking. Indeed we may say of the world, but slightly altering the Apostle's words, that "the will is present with the world, but how to perform that which is good we find not. For the good that we would, we do do ; but the evil which we would not, that we do." ² There is to-day, as there was in S. Paul's time, but one solution of the difficulty. The power we need is in God, and in God alone. The world needs a great religious revival, a great return to God. Nothing else can save it. In some ways things are ripe for such a revival. The "oppositions of science, falsely so called," ³ which made religious faith so hard during the last quarter of the nineteenth century are at an end. Neither philosophy

¹ S. John xvii. 11.

² Rom. vii. 18 and 19.

³ 1 Tim. vi, 20.

nor natural science to-day offers us, as it were at the point of the sword, a world in which there is no room for God, or Immortality, or Moral Freedom, or the reality of spiritual things. Rather it may be said that the most distinctive message of philosophy and science to the world to-day almost echoes the words of S. John "Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be."¹ And the biblical criticism, so much feared by our fathers and grandfathers, after two generations of unceasing activity has surely left us our bibles more than ever established as the Spirit-inspired record of God's dealings with His children. And finally there is a great, and I think a growing, sense of the need for God. Yet some things are lacking. There is no deep sense of sin. We are sure that the post-war world is very uncomfortable, and very dangerous. We are hardly prepared to say "and . . . indeed justly, for we receive the due reward of our deeds."² And though there is, as I have said, a great sense of our need of God's help I doubt if there is any real understanding of the conditions on which alone that help can be had. It is one thing to desire that God should come in and help us to make the world what we would have it be. It is another, and a very different thing to surrender ourselves to Him to be His instruments in making the world, and ourselves, what He would have it, and us, to be. I sometimes doubt if many, even among genuinely religious people, realize how great a gulf lies between these two attitudes of mind. I am sure that the attitude of many well-meaning, but unconverted and worldly-minded people

¹ 1 S. John iii. 2.

² S. Luke xxiii. 41.

would not be misrepresented if it were described as a desire that God should come in and make Himself generally useful in securing the pleasantness of this world and the comfort of its inhabitants. The amazement, indeed we may say the shocked and indignant amazement, of such people that God should allow anyone to suffer as many suffered during the war, is a sufficient proof that their conception of God is of One Whose first duty is to make things comfortable. But the first task, one may ever say the first duty, of a God of Holiness is not to make people comfortable but to make them holy. And for that we must seek to do His will, not to coerce or coax or cajole Him into doing ours. For, as an old friend of mine, a Wesleyan local preacher, who used to preach on the Open Air Market, known as the "Flat Iron Market" by Sacred Trinity Church, Salford, once beautifully and truly said "God is the best Master in the world but He *will be Master*. If He comes into your heart, where He wants to come, He must come to rule."

CHAPTER VIII

GOD'S CLAIM TO BE MASTER

DID we not, in the last paragraph of last chapter, touch the real cause of failure, disillusionment and disappointment in religion? "God is the best Master in the world, but He will be Master"; and in every age there have been individuals, and nations, who have desired God's blessings on less exacting terms. Well! they are not to be had on any less exacting terms. When I was a little boy my mother used to read me stories from a book of lovely allegories for children. One of them told of a great sea which had to be crossed by a number of boys and girls, each of whom had to cross it in his or her own boat. In the boat was room for the owner and the Pilot, *and for nothing else*. If a child wished to keep even one of the many-coloured and beautiful shells, which he had picked up on the shore before embarking, there was no room for the Pilot. And the story described the struggles, and dangers, and all but destruction, of one boy who clung to one last dearly loved rainbow-tinted shell which prevented the Pilot from sailing with him. As soon as I was old enough to leave off delighting in the stories simply as stories, and to think of their meaning, I supposed that the coloured shells were sins. One of the chief lessons of life for me has been to learn that other things besides

sins will do to keep the Pilot out of the ship or (to drop metaphor and allegory) to exclude Christ from the heart. There must be nothing which we put before Him. He does not ask us to give up all for Him. He does ask us to have nothing *which we would not be willing to surrender at His word*. Surely this is the lesson which confronts us, right at the beginning of the history of personal religion, in the story of Abraham on the mountain Jehovah-jireh (Genises xxii). Not Abraham's own son, not God's own best gift to Abraham, must be withheld, or allowed to occupy in his heart the throne where God should reign alone. If anyone complains that this is a hard, austere, repellant doctrine, presenting God in an unlovely and unattractive light, I might be content to quote our Blessed Lord's own words "He that loveth father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me; and he that loveth son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me."¹ But I do not need to take shelter, as it were, behind any quotation, even of the words of Christ Himself. I am sure the religious conscience of any man who thinks seriously will lead him to see both that it is true that God will allow nothing to occupy, in our hearts, the place that should be His, and also why this is true. It is because God Himself is, beyond everything else, and beyond all comparison, our chief and best good, and our Heavenly Father in His love will not allow us to rest content with anything but the very best. Once, when I had been preaching on this subject a very famous soldier told me a story afterwards which serves as a very good illustration. He said that when he was at school he was expecting

¹ S. Matt. x. 37.

to be Captain of cricket. And it was a school to be cricket captain of which would have been an honour for life. And then, just before the cricket season opened, his father took him away from school and put him with a private tutor. "I simply could not believe it" he said to me. "I could not believe that my father could be so cruel. Just for a little laziness, a little neglect of my books, to punish me so savagely, and to take away the one thing I most desired. It seemed too cruel. At first I could hardly believe it. And it was ten years before the bitterness died out of my heart. But, thank God, before the old man died I was able to tell him that I knew he had done right, and to thank him for having done it." Of course the father was right. He saw his boy neglecting his work, and endangering his career for the sake of a game, a passing honour, a coloured cricket cap. And he loved the boy too well, too unselfishly, to allow it. It must have been hard for the father, himself a member of the same famous school, to deprive his son of the honour, and harder still to see the boy hard and angry and resentful. But he loved his son too well to let him choose anything but the highest and best good. Even so God often takes what we most desire, the one thing on which our heart is fixed, saying clearly to us "Son . . . behold I take away from thee the desire of thine eyes with a stroke,"¹ and we are tempted to doubt whether He can indeed be a loving Father, and to think Him cruel and hard, and to nourish, perhaps for years, bitterness and resentment against Him. Well for us if, before we die, we are able to tell God that we are sure He was right, and

¹ Ezekiel xxiv. 16.

to thank Him for what He did. Better still if there is no time of bitterness and shaken faith but if, from the very first, we are able to trust Him and, even in the darkest hour, to cry "Though He slay me, yet will I trust in Him."¹

One thing that adds to the difficulty of thus trusting the love and wisdom of God is that we often feel that what God has done is really producing harm not good. We do not say, in plain and bald language, "If God knew what was for the best as well as I do He would never have acted as He has," but that is what it comes to. That He should ask us to give up our sins for His sake is no more than what is right and natural, we feel. That even good and harmless things, health and comfort and pleasure, should sometimes have to be surrendered may, we think, be reasonable. But why should men and women, zealous in His service and doing good to thousands, be taken away by premature death, or rendered useless by wasting sickness? Above all why should young men of ability and of promise be cut off before they have had time to do one hour of service in the vineyard of this world? To such questions there is but one answer. It is an answer which to the world seems, and must always seem, no answer at all, and which, on the contrary, to the man who knows God will always seem absolutely adequate. It is the answer that our Heavenly Father must know best, that He desires nothing but our highest good, and that if we will trust Him we shall not be left long without assuring proof. And the man who is prepared to trust God has at any rate this advantage over the

¹ Job xiii. 15.

worldly minded man that whereas the latter gets nothing but bitterness of heart, and wretchedness of days, from his rebellion and anger against God, the child of God gets great consolation and peace, the peace of God which passes all understanding.

Some time ago, in a big city church in which I was preaching a course of Lenten midday sermons, I spoke of how S. Paul had been tried and tested by God. After he had given up all for Christ, as he hoped and believed, God asked of him yet further proofs of his whole-hearted devotion. He whose sole desire was to preach the gospel had to lie, weary year after weary year, in prison first in Caesarea and then in Rome. He who had no thought for anything but the extension of his Master's Kingdom had to hear of defections, and of fallings away, and of the spread of heresies, and, himself inactive, to know that his foes, and the foes of the Gospel, were active. And, hardest of all perhaps to poor human nature, he whose desire was to be "chargeable to no man,"¹ and whose boast it is that "these hands have ministered to my necessities,"² has to become a pensioner and to live on alms. And we know, from the bright, serene, happy Epistle to the Philippians how nobly he responded to God's call. And, speaking of all this, I said that God often asked us to give up that in which we most delighted and, instead of having the glory of doing great things for Him, to learn, in patience and humility, that while God uses our services He needs not them but us. After the service a clergyman who, before he had a terrible

¹ 2 Cor. xi. 9 ; 1 Thess ii. 9 ; and 2 Thess. iii. 8.

² Acts xx. 34.

accident, had been one of the most capable, zealous, and untiring of workers, wrote to me and said "What you said yesterday was true. I used to pride myself on my powers of work for God's Church. Since He called on me to be an invalid for His sake I have *done* less, but I think I have prayed more. Not perhaps a bad exchange. He knows best what is good for each of us."

I do not say, for I do not think, that it is an easy matter thus to trust God. Least of all is it easy when it is not upon ourselves but upon someone we love, that the discipline falls. But then I do not think I ever made the mistake of supposing that religion was easy, or the salvation of a soul a light task. If there is any truth in Christianity at all; if man's salvation could be achieved by nothing less than the death of the Son of God Himself on Calvary; if the whole great drama of the Incarnation, the Atonement, the Resurrection and Ascension, and the Mission of the Holy Ghost is rendered credible by the greatness of the task set before God by the need for man's redemption—and if that task was not a great one the whole story of God made Man for man's sake is utterly incredible—then what right have we to suppose that man's own private individual effort will be a light and easy one? I want to stress the greatness of the task, the importance and magnitude of what God asks of us not only because I am sure that that is the teaching of the New Testament—which always speaks of the Christian life as one of joy, indeed, but of the joy of effort, and struggle, and self denial, and victory long delayed and hardly attained—but because I am sure it is the best way of attracting

disciples. Our presentation of the Gospel to-day lacks a breath of sternness, of austerity, and so generous hearted young men and women turn—and, if Christianity as it is too often presented is all that the religion of Christ has it in it to be, rightly turn—to socialism, or the teaching of Nietzsche, or to one or other of the new schemes of life and of thought which call for some effort and offer some rewards of battle. But there is no need to turn away from the old faith and there is to-day, as there was when first it was asked, but one answer to the question “Art Thou He that should come, or look we for another?”¹ and that is the answer of experience. Let anyone try really to live the Christ-life and he will find that it makes demands enough on every part of man’s nature, and yields fruit enough to content the most exacting.

And the reason for God’s dealings with us is not really far to seek or hard to understand. Let us state the matter, as it were, argumentatively. Either man is immortal or he is not. If he is not, if the individual does not live again, then *there is no meaning in life at all*. Life is nothing but

“ a tale

Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury

Signifying nothing.”

But if man is an immortal spirit, so that there lies before him an eternity of joyful activity in the service of God, then the real significance of this life only becomes apparent when we recognise it as a school of character in which we are trained for the fuller life beyond the grave. This, of course, is quite frankly and explicitly

¹ S. Luke vii. 19.

“other-worldliness,” and it is a doctrine which before the war aroused violent and scornful opposition. Again and again we clergy were told, quite plainly and explicitly in words, and even more plainly and explicitly in men’s actions and in their whole attitude to life and to religion, that we should not bother about getting people into Heaven but should try to make a Heaven of this world. Well between 1914 and 1918—yes and since the Armistice too—we have seen what sort of a Heaven men produce when they forget God and the apostolic injunction to “set your affection on things above not on things on the earth.”¹ A life without God, a life of self seeking instead of mutual service, a life where a man’s happiness is sought in things possessed rather than in spiritual goods enjoyed, this is an utterly unnatural life, and pursued on a large scale can only produce a diseased state in the whole of human society. And what has been denounced as “other worldliness” is really an attempt to look facts in the face and to see man as he really is, namely as a spiritual being in the making, preparing for an eternity of joyful co-operation with God, the source of all good.

And this view of the present world as a school or training ground of souls, having as its supreme end and aim the production of noble character, is the only one which offers us a satisfactory key to the various puzzles and problems of daily life. Imagine a visitor being shewn over a school, and supposing that the sole object of the school was either (a) the immediate pleasure and happiness of the children, or (b) the production of the greatest possible number of perfect

¹ Col. iii. 2.

copy-books and well finished drawings, or (c) the increased reputation of the school as one that won scholarships at the universities. How puzzled such a man would be. If immediate pleasure is the object, why make the children do tasks they don't like, and above all why punish them? If perfect results are what is desired why don't the teachers take the copy-books and drawing boards out of the children's feeble unskilled hands and do the work themselves? If the greatest possible number of university successes is what is aimed at why not concentrate on the few clever boys and not waste time and effort on the dull ones? It is only when we realize the true aim of the true schoolmaster, which is to give to every single boy the best possible preparation for the wider life which awaits him when school is done, that everything in the school day becomes intelligible. So too with this world and God. We wonder why a loving Father allows pain and trial, and why He permits stupid men to bungle His plans for the world and wicked men to run counter to them—instead of forcibly taking things out of man's hands and doing them Himself—and above all why He is so long suffering and patient with the stupid, and the lazy, and the selfish, and the cruel, and the wicked. Only when we realize that this world is a school, and that God is our infinitely wise and patient Schoolmaster, Who seeks "to cultivate an infinite number of souls" and Who is "gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness,"¹ do we understand the world. And as soon as we see the world as a school we hear God calling us to help Him in the work, to be as it were pupil teachers under Him, "fellow helpers to the truth."²

¹ Joel ii. 13.

² 3 S. John 8.

CHAPTER IX

THE DISCIPLINE OF DAILY LIFE

So, if the line of thought pursued in this book is correct, we have something which it will not perhaps be presumptuous to call a philosophy of life. Man, we believe, is made for God, made in His likeness and for union with Him. But if we are made in His likeness, and if we are to share His life, we are made for a life of love, of service, of giving. And just as God *has nothing to give but Himself*, so that for the wicked man, who has lost the power to desire or to enjoy God, there truly is no Heaven, so we have nothing to give but ourselves, and so much of God as is in us. Hence man's true life is the life of service, and the highest and noblest service he can render is to pass on to others the life of God which he himself enjoys. To be the clearest and most unclouded window, through which the radiance of God's countenance may shine unhindered upon others; to be a wide and unblocked pipe through which the healing waters of "the Ocean that is God" can flow unhindered to the whole world, that is man's highest good. When Elisha said to Elijah "I pray thee, let a double portion of thy spirit be upon me"¹ it is no wonder that the elder prophet said "Thou hast asked a hard thing," for he had asked, not that he might be a greater

¹ 2 Kings ii. 9.

man than his master but that his power to serve God and his fellowmen, let it be what it might be, might in the future be doubled. And that is at once a hard task and the task to which all men are called. Indeed we may say that man's whole task is summed up in these two duties, namely more and more perfect surrender to God and more and more unstinted service of man. And this is not merely man's duty but his highest happiness and good. The two sides of his duty are also the two sides of his joy. We might fancy that to lose oneself in God, to make an entire surrender to Him, to be forced to say "I am crucified with Christ"¹ would be giving up some of the joy, some of the fulness of life. That it is hard, difficult to do, a thing weak human nature shrinks from, no one will deny. We want to "be ourselves" and to "live our own lives." We fear to surrender ourselves unreservedly to God, we say to Him "I feared Thee, because Thou art an austere man: Thou takest up that Thou layedst not down, and reapest that Thou didst not sow,"² and standing on the brink of "the Ocean that is God" we hesitate to make the plunge. This fear of God, quite apart from love for any sin that might hold us back; this fear of His immensity; this clinging to the tiny shell of our "self-hood"; this is a thing known to all the mystics. And yet till the plunge is made there is no real happiness, and when it is made there is "fulness of joy . . . pleasure for evermore."³ All the saints in all the ages have borne witness to this but I will adduce the evidence of two friends, whose testimony to God I have already made use of in this book. The

¹ Gal. ii. 20.² S. Luke xix. 21.³ Psalm xvi. 12.

young officer in the Flying Corps, quoted in Chapter IV, had a wonderfully full and interesting life before his conversion, and baptism at the age of about twenty-seven. Yet he said to me, some years after, "I never knew what it was to be a man, till I found God." And the old Wesleyan local preacher, quoted at the end of Chapter VII, once declared in an open-air sermon, "Brothers it just comes to this: God just suits me. Aye, and I suit Him, for His Nature and His Name is Love." In both cases God has "shewn them the path of life" and in His presence they had found "the fulness of joy . . . pleasure for evermore."

And if we may truly say that the first half of man's duty, namely entire surrender to God, is his highest joy, we may with equal truth say exactly the same of the other half of his duty, namely the duty of unstinting service of man. When our Saviour said "It is more blessed to give than to receive,"¹ He did not mean that it was more truly virtuous, religious, and proper, He meant what He said, that it was ever so much nicer, pleasanter, more enjoyable and jollier.

Going back then to what we said in the first chapter we see how silly are those people who either try to do good without striving to be good, or who fuss about being good, without striving at the same time to do good. The first are like men who rush out to succour those dying of hunger and thirst and, with the utmost goodwill, press upon them empty plates and dry and dusty drinking cups. The second are like people so busy packing hampers of food for the starving, and trying to fill more full, cups and bottles already overflowing, that they never even start for the famine area.

Let us, remembering the phrase already quoted, "Saved to Serve," pray and strive to avoid both mistakes. A few practical suggestions may be helpful.

I am quite certain—I grow more and more certain every day—that only by being holy, only by real moral goodness which has its roots in the knowledge and love of God, can we truly serve our fellow men. But you need not wait till you are perfect in holiness before you begin to serve. Indeed if you try to do so you will soon cease to make any progress yourself. Each gift of God's Grace must be used as it is given, so that room may be made in your heart for more. As grace is spent it creates a need which God hastens to supply with fresh outpourings. *Solvitur ambulando*, the problem of the religious life is solved in living that life. Every advance you make in the knowledge of God, or in power of prayer, or in mastery of self, should lead to some corresponding advance in service. And every piece of service, well and truly done, will not merely confirm and strengthen your faith, and give you increased power in the use of spiritual weapons, and more mastery over all your powers of body, mind and soul, but will also force you to make increased calls upon God, calls to which He will hasten to respond. Two sayings of S. Paul's may supply us here with suitable meditations. They are "To them who, by *patient continuance in well being* seek for glory and honour, and immortality, God will render eternal life"¹ and "Having therefore these promises, dearly beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, *perfecting holiness in the fear of God.*"²

¹ Rom. ii. 7.

² 2 Cor. vii. 1.

Keeping then clearly before us these two ideas of patient continuance in well doing, and of steady growth in personal holiness, let us consider the question of service. Service, like charity, should "begin at home." I and my brothers and sister were happy, in our childhood's days, in the services of an old family nurse, and she had many expressions full of homely wisdom. One was a charge of "keeping our pretty looks for strangers." Does the reader keep his or her pretty looks for strangers, forgetting the duties of religion in the home? Dickens knew human nature when he drew Mrs. Jellyby whose fine eyes could not see anything nearer than Africa, and "the very contentious gentleman, who said it was his mission to be everybody's brother, but who appeared to be on terms of coolness with the whole of his large family." But the varied relationships of the family are ordained by God. The family and not the individual is the true unity of which the edifice of society is built. And no country or nation can be great or prosperous or happy where the Home decays. And only clergy, perhaps, are in a position to estimate to the full the widespread, and utterly needless, misery and wretchedness caused by selfishness at home. It would be easy to fill a book, and a big book too, with examples, drawn from my own experience, of what home life can be where all the members are "kindly affectioned one to another in honour preferring one another,"¹ and on the other hand of the utter misery which comes in with selfishness. In the family of the first type we have the best picture of the life of Heaven, the life of God Himself, that earth affords. Such a home was painted for me,

¹ Rom. xii. 10.

by a young married friend, in words which make perhaps the best sermon on married life I have ever heard. Explaining to me how, since they were married and the children came, he and his wife could not get out so much to the pictures, or the theatre, he said "Its worth it. If we have less pleasure, we have more happiness." And in the family of the second type we can see, at work and yielding their natural and inevitable fruit, all the causes which make the squalor and misery of our great towns, and the anarchy of our social and industrial life, and the turmoil of a war-broken and war-terrified world. The home is at once the natural school of the Christian virtues, and the first place in which they must be exercised and displayed.

Indeed it cannot be expected that we shall solve the giant problems of the city, the state, and the world—which are themselves wholly and entirely moral problems in reality, however much we may pretend that they are economic and social problems, and so beyond man's control—till we have made a much more earnest effort, and attained a much greater degree of success, in the solution of the moral problems of the individual and the home. People sometimes ask me if I think we shall ever abolish war, and whether I think England should at once sink all her battleships and disband her army. But surely that is to begin at the wrong end, and to try to run before we can walk or even before we can stand steady on our feet. Before we can hope to abolish war we must see some real effort, on the part of many men and women, to put Christ's maxim "Resist not evil"¹ into practice in private life. There are two things

¹ S. Matt. v. 39.

which cannot be too often insisted on. The first is that the teaching of the Sermon on the Mount is not an *Interimethik*, meant for those who, Jesus of Nazareth falsely supposed, would see the Last Day very shortly, but quite unsuited for the work-a-day world of to-day, nor a collection of striking eastern paradoxes which we do well to ignore. The doctrine of the Sermon on the Mount is the teaching of One Who "knew all men, and needed not that any should testify of man; for He knew what was in man."¹ Hence it is a real guide to, and perfectly adapted for, man as he should be, and as he will be when he has been perfected. But the second thing is that the Sermon on the Mount is not a series of rule-of-thumb maxims which can be put into practice by any selfish, cruel, and lustful man to his own advantage, and that of others. To conjure with Christ's rod you must be one of His disciples, and to live successfully by His doctrine you must be trying to drink of His cup and to be baptized with the baptism which He is baptized with."² Any one can prove both these truths for himself quite easily. Let the reader try loving his enemy (treating, that is to say, someone who has behaved badly as if he had behaved well), or turning the other cheek, or insisting on giving some selfish and grasping person, who always grabs more than his share, more even than he has claimed, or in any other way refusing to resist evil or trust in force and in punishment. Immediately he will learn two things. First he will realize that he has behaved in a perfectly natural and rational way and that what he has done is not a

¹ S. John ii. 25.

² S. Matt. xx. 22.

surprising effort of virtue, but something which *entirely suits him and is its own reward*. And secondly he will learn that if he fails the failure has been wholly his own, never the failure of the principles he has been trying to put into practice. There are times when, in the management of my Lads' Club, or Lads' Whitweek Camp, or large and somewhat turbulent Ragged School class, I can be a true "Christian Anarchist," refusing to use rules and punishments and force. That is when I am myself at my best. There are other times when these methods fail. But I know, and all who have tried similar experiments know, that the failure is in me, not in the boys. I don't say the boys have not behaved badly in the second case. Very likely they behaved badly in the first. But evil has no real power against good. Good is always stronger than evil. When evil conquers it is because we have been "overcome of evil" instead of "overcoming evil with good."¹ But there is nothing that will save the world but the teaching of Jesus Christ put into practice on a wide scale. And the first and highest duty of every man is to train and exercise himself to be an exponent of Christ's methods, and to do so by practising those methods immediately, to-day and during the coming week, and so on all through life, in the immediate circle in which God has placed him, firstly in the home, and after that in ever widening spheres. And we may all be assured that as we become more expert, and our powers are more and more developed, God will—if He thinks fit—provide a wider stage on which we may play our part. Though we are by no means the best

¹ Rom. xii. 21.

judges as to what constitutes the most important and influential sphere. Carlisle, in his *French Revolution* says that viewed from the fixed stars the France which Louis XV. was ruining might well look no bigger than any backyard, or farm midden, on which some private person, the reader perhaps, is dealing unjustly and living ill. The thought is a profoundly true one. In the eyes of God any plain honest man, dealing justly behind a counter, or in a warehouse, and living in kindness with his neighbours, or any devoted working-class mother cooking, cleaning, baking, washing, mending and nursing for a large family, and bringing them up to be honest, kindly, God-fearing men and women, may be doing not only a better but a more important work than the Prime Minister of a great country, or the General over vast armies.

The point is this. You want to serve your fellowmen and to do some good in the world? Well and good! But are you trained for your part in God's great war against evil. Have you learned to use the weapons of your spiritual combat by daily practice on the field—seemingly narrow but quite broad enough for your needs—of daily duties? Or are you day dreaming of the great things you would do, if you had the chance, while the daily opportunities slip past you? Above all, is it possible that you are so misusing the time of training that, if and when the great opportunity comes, you will be found unfit to embrace it.

The only obstacle to a better world is the lack of a great many more, and a great many better, servants of God.

CHAPTER X

THE POWER OF GOD UNTO SALVATION

I CAN imagine that many of my readers, especially among young people, full of generous enthusiasm, anxious to be up and doing, and keen to abolish the cruelties, inequalities and stupidities of our present system, will have read so far with no little impatience. "We want," they will feel inclined to cry, "to live for others, and you do nothing but repeat the old maxims, aye, the old catchwords of personal religion. You bid us think wholly of ourselves and our own souls, when we want to think and work only for others, and would willingly lose even our own souls, if so we could improve the world; saying, with St. Paul 'I could wish that myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh.'"¹ Now certainly I have laid great stress on the need for personal holiness because the passage I have chosen for the motto for this book does really represent my deepest conviction. I am convinced that we shall not get a better world, nay I will go further and say that I am convinced that God does not mean us to get a better world, *except by becoming better men.*

¹ 1 Cor. vii. 31.

For what God cares most about is immortal souls, human characters, which abide for ever, not a world the fashion of which passeth away. But I would not have anyone suppose that I am indifferent to social reform or without faith in man's power to bring in a better state of things. Rather I am sure that the present interest in social questions, the deep sense of the evils of our civilization, of its cruelty, and ugliness, and wastefulness, are inspired by God. And I am sure that we could make this world a happy and beautiful place if we were really in earnest. But I have absolutely no belief in the view that this can be attained by some external change of what my many young socialist friends call "the System." I can quite see the attractions of this view. If you declare, as a thing clearly axiomatic, that nobody can be a Christian under a competitive system, you thereby absolve yourself from the obligation of making the effort. If you place all the blame of our present failures to the credit, or rather discredit, of "the System" you have an explanation of them much less galling to one's pride than if you place the blame on yourself and men and women like you. Above all, to youth, which is always hasty and impatient, it is much pleasanter to believe that evil can be abolished, and Utopia brought in, by changing that vague and indefinite thing "the System"—to change which might, we think, be quite quickly and easily effected, say at the next General Election—than it is to look for the desired end along the tedious paths of moral improvement. But I do not believe that any system, whether of National Socialism, Guild Socialism, Communism, or anything else would work while the

bulk of men and women are fierce, greedy, and lustful. All such efforts have always broken down in the past, from the days of the first Christian community in Jerusalem to our own day, for the fully sufficient reason that *men and women were not good enough for them*. And they will always break down in the future till we have better men and women. To put the matter quite bluntly, God does not mean us to have the rewards of happiness and comfort except on His conditions of moral improvement.

But there is no reason why we should not have better men and women. When, as a young man, I used to air my socialistic schemes for a perfect world old Tory friends used to shake wise heads and say "All that sounds very nice, my boy, but I am afraid it would never work. You will find you are up against human nature. You have got to change that first." With this I now so far agree that I am sure there will be no change in society without a corresponding change in human nature. This, looked at rightly, is obvious. Our social institutions are nothing but our minds materialized. A Kafir village expresses Kafir ways of thinking and feeling; New York is the American mind turned into stone, brick, and re-inforced concrete; and, as Dr. Temple, Bishop of Manchester, has truly said, if you take 800,000 men and women neither better nor worse than the average, greedy for pleasure, careless of duty, and indifferent to the claims of others, any one of our hideous modern cities, with its gaols, and slums, and publichouses and general ugliness, is what you may naturally expect. Indeed the neglect of this aspect of the subject on the part of many social reformers is

astonishing. I once travelled with a very keen Guild Socialist who, for two hours, expounded his views to me. I asked him if he had allowed enough for the weaknesses of human nature. He replied "I never pay any attention to human nature." "Then," I replied "you have destroyed my interest in all you have said during the last two hours." For morality and social science have a common foundation, namely that we are members one of another, and we owe the fact that either is possible to man's ability to restrain in himself the ape and the tiger, and to realize love. And yet there are men who pretend that the new social order can be achieved not only without morality but by means of an ostentatious repudiation of moral systems, and that the motive power in which we are to

" build Jerusalem

In this our green and pleasant land "

is hatred.

But, it will be asked, can Christianity change human nature? Certainly it can. What else is it for? If it can't do that it can do nothing. The promise of Christianity is that "the creation itself also shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the liberty of the glory of the children of God." And this promise is literally fulfilled, as far as individuals are concerned, daily before our eyes. Nothing astonishes me more than the failure of many, I might almost say most, people to recognise the power of a vital religion to create a "new man." Let me pick a few examples out of thousands I have known. Thirty years ago a working-man said to me, "A drunken man you may cure, sir, but a drunken woman never." I simply replied, "And

what about Mrs. H.?" "I've got my answer," he replied. I had named one who had been the terror of the district, and who, when I spoke and for twenty years after, to the day of her death, was a saint, the best mother, the kindest friend, the brightest merriest companion, in the world.

Just before the war I was walking up and down our rather dingy Mission Room, during the "tea interval" of a Tuesday night Temperance Concert, talking to the young flying-corps officer whom I have mentioned more than once already. Suddenly he said to me "Who is that woman, over there in the corner, with the beautiful face?" Strictly speaking she was only a plain, hard featured Lancashire woman of five or six and forty. But the light of a very beautiful soul shone through. I told my friend her story. She had drunk fearfully, making her home a perfect hell for her husband and children. Then she was truly converted. And some time after she said to one of our lady visitors "You never come to see me, Miss, without looking round to see if there is any drink in the house. Well, I am sure I don't blame you. For I often wonder how God made a woman out of the dreadful thing I was. But I shall never go back to the drink. Sometimes even now my body cries out for it till I can't sleep. But its not me, its my body. Its something outside me, like a dog barking in the yard, which can keep me away, and make me miserable, but it can't touch me. I shall never go back to it."

But people often deny that cases of reformed drunkards are real evidence. Drunkenness, they say, is a form of madness. If some strong emotion supplies

the power to abstain from alcohol for a short time the desire for it vanishes, the patient has time and opportunity to realize the misery, danger, and degradation of his slavery, and a cure results in most cases. But there are plenty of "new men" besides reformed drunkards. I could quote cases of the results of conversion in which sins and short comings of all sorts, lust, and cruelty, and bad temper, and selfishness, had been cured, the old man done away and the new man raised up. And the power of the Spirit is not shewn only in the reform of those who have fallen, but often equally plainly, and even more attractively, in the growth and development of those who have sought God early and found him. I could quote many examples since, as I said in Chapter VI, one of my reasons for believing in Christianity, is that "it suits boys and girls." But it is far better that the reader should collect his or her own examples. If anyone doubts the power of Christ, and wonders whether we should not do better to look to education, or social reform, or a changed political system, for improvement, and, in short says to Christ, "Art Thou he That should come, or look we for another?" the answer to-day is the same as it was nineteen centuries ago, namely the witness of the things which we have heard and seen, "How that the blind see, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, to the poor the gōspel is preached."¹ Some people will object that Christ here was speaking of *physical* marvels and I am applying the text merely to *moral* cures. I do not admit it. I am willing to grant that, owing to the weak state of religion generally,

¹ S. Luke vii. 20 and 22.

and the feebleness of our faith, and the Church's forgetfulness of her mission to heal the body as well as the soul, physical miracles are rare, *but they are not unknown*. I will take but one example from my own experience. Some time ago a very old working woman died in a back street in Salford. Some time before she died she told me how, when she was about 35, after having drunk very heavily for years, she took epileptic fits. These grew on her till she often had four or five a day and could never be trusted in the street alone. After six and twenty years of this affliction, during which "she had suffered many things of many physicians, and had spent all that she had, and was nothing bettered, but rather grew worse,"¹ she was converted, under the ministry of the late Canon Hicks, afterwards Bishop of Lincoln, and Captain Rowlands of the Church Army. "That night in Barrow Street Mission Room" she said "I prayed 'O Lord, as Thou hast taken away the sin of my soul, take away the weakness of my body.'" After the meeting she walked home by herself, and never had the least symptom of a fit again. Truly "the voice of joy and health is in the dwellings of the righteous,"² and if we have fewer miracles of healing than we desire, I think we have as many as we deserve.

But if Christ can make of one poor sinner, broken and ruined in soul and body, a "New Man" He can work the same miracle for ten, or ten million, or fifteen hundred million. What hinders Him is men's lack of faith. "He can do no mighty works because of their unbelief."

Now we may frankly admit that, if all the whole

¹ S. Mark v. 26.

² Ps. cxviii 15 P. B. version.

world were deeply and truly converted to-day the task—supposing the world did not at once come to an end, which I am inclined to believe it would do—would have to be done all over again with the next generation. For a man is not a Christian because his parents were, but each individual soul has to make the individual decision for Christ. But though each generation has to fight the battle anew that battle has not, in each generation, to be refought on the same plane. There is such a thing as progress and each generation may, and should, fight on a higher plane and dispute loftier issues than the last. We have abolished slavery, and duelling, and the worst forms of religious persecution, and improved the status of women, and gained a faith in the essential brotherhood of all men, and aroused a public conscience on the question of undeserved suffering, and founded hospitals and orphanages, and lunatic asylums which are asylums and not hells of torture. It seems to me that anyone who denies the *Gesta Christi*, the works of Christ and His Church, in the world must be utterly ignorant of history. Let such a man try to do some first hand study—study that is to say of contemporary writings—of the later Roman Empire, of Germany during the Thirty Years War, of France under Louis XV., of the England of the Georges, and ask “Is there no progress here?” It is the fashion with opponents of Christianity to put down all the evil in history to the church and all the good to “civilization.” But what is Christian civilization but the working of “that one and the self-same Spirit, dividing to every man (and nation) severally as He will?”¹ And if

¹ 1 Cor. xii. 11.

anyone claims that that Spirit is the spirit of man, not of Christ, I will ask him to study life in non-Christian countries. I will offer three pieces of testimony.

Some few months before he died the late Sir Mark Sykes, the great authority on Mahommedan countries, who had a real love and admiration for the Turks, said to me "No one who has lived all his life in Christian countries knows all he owes to Christianity. He does not know the awful morass of cruelty, degradation, and filth on which non-Christian civilization rests."

And this agrees perfectly with what a missionary bishop from Central Africa once said to me. He declared that it was quite impossible for anyone, who had not experienced it, to realize what the atmosphere of a predominantly heathen country was like, or the difference made by even a small leaven of practising Christians. "The setting up of the first Christian altar," he declared, "is like lighting a candle in a dark room. It may not be powerful enough to scatter all the shadows. But it *makes all the difference between light and darkness.*"

And less this testimony, being that of a missionary, should be regarded as biased, I will quote the witness of a South African Director of Native Labour, a man who had had wide experience of native labourers in Asia, Africa, and America. It was quite curious to contrast his sincere and whole-hearted admiration both for Chinamen and for Kafirs as men, and his sense of the splendid material which they offered for evangelisation, with his absolute horror of their moral condition. Indeed, though a very loyal and practising churchman, ready to go to any trouble to help his church, he was very bitter about the failure of the church at home to

support missions adequately and to try and bring the heathen world out of darkness to light.

May we not ask what a man can know of Christ in his own life if he doubts His power to change human nature and to save the whole world? If anyone knows Christ's power in his own life, will he not say "I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ; for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth, to the Jew first, and also to the Greek?"¹

¹ Rom. i. 16.

CHAPTER XI

THE CHRISTIAN IN THE WORLD TO-DAY

WE are now to consider how this mighty regenerative force of personal religion may best be brought to bear on the problems which await solution. And in this enquiry we cannot be too plain, too homely, or too definite. What is wanted is not vague generalizations but simple rules which can be put into practice by plain men and women between Sunday morning and Saturday night.

Well first of all we must be content to follow the directions of conscience without expecting to see immediate results. There are somewhere about 1500 million people in the world. Each one is a potential member of the Body of Christ,¹ through whom the Holy Spirit might work. When all possible allowances have been made for the heathen, and for unconverted and imperfectly converted Christians, there must still be very many millions of true and sincere fellow-labourers with God. Hence the part of the work done by each must be small, though not for that reason unimportant. If we hold back till we can see the object, importance and immediate result of each piece of work for

¹ 1 Cor. xii. 27.

God, we shall be like soldiers in the late war declining to do any work which could not be shewn to lead to an immediate and final victory. Often soldiers have no idea at all why they are called on to do this or that. It is enough for them that it is the General's orders, and that it forms part of his plan of campaign. If we strive earnestly to obey the teachings of the Church, and the dictates of our consciences, we cannot go wrong, for our Captain of Salvation¹ is not one who blunders. And a very little thought will convince us that it is a good thing that we have thus to "walk by faith, not by sight."² If we saw the immediate result of all our efforts for God, we might be—indeed we could hardly help being—influenced by desire for those results rather than by love for God. And if the results were as easily seen by others as by ourselves, how difficult it would be to exclude pride, self-seeking and the desire for the praise of men. Now and then of course God allows one of His workers to "see the travail of his soul, and be satisfied."³ I expect many Sunday School teachers and social workers during the war got letters something like the following, which was written to an old Bible Class leader by a young soldier, the night before he was killed in action :

"Dear Friend, I take my pen in hand to write you these few lines, for somehow I think I may never have another chance. It was a good day, not only for me but for all our family, when you first knocked at our door. Perhaps you have thought me ungrateful, for I have never been able to thank

¹ Heb. ii. 10.

² 2 Cor. v. 7.

³ Isaiah liii. 17.

you the way I ought, for all you have done for us. But some day, when you are as near death as I think I am to-night, it may comfort you to know that if there is any good in me I owe it all to you. May God bless you, dear friend, if we never meet again."

But such rewards, such proofs of success, are and must be the exception, not the rule. We must be content to do our work for the love of God alone.

But one thing we can all do, and that is—if I may quote again the text with which the last chapter ended—to shew boldly to the whole world that we are "not ashamed of the gospel of Christ," and that we do indeed believe that it is "the power of God unto salvation unto everyone that believeth." If we believed half that we read in the newspapers, and half that we hear, often from churchmen and churchwomen who ought to know better, we should believe that science had utterly disproved, and philosophers unanimously rejected, Christianity, that historical and textual criticism had left no chapter of Holy Scripture not discredited, that the moral influence of the Church was negligible and her social services non-existent, that the churches were empty and the clergy lazy and despised, depressed themselves and depressing to others. M. Coué assures us that if we say, with conviction, "Every day and in every way I am getting better and better" we do get better and better. Then what is the effect on ourselves—to say nothing of the effect on eager and enthusiastic young people, and on a careless and indifferent, and even hostile, world—of saying over and over again "Every day and in every way the Church grows more and more futile, and religion is proved to be more and more worthless?"

Do we not all know how it cheers and braces us to meet someone with an obvious faith and delight in his or her religion? Some time ago I was in mixed company where there was an obvious tendency to sneer at religion. Quietly and unostentaciously, but quite firmly and clearly, a leading business man of about 45, the head of a vast business, and interested in half a score of other concerns as well, let it be known that he was a churchman, that he loved and tried to practice his religion, and that he counted nothing a trouble where he could help and support his Vicar. Instantly the whole trend of the conversation, the whole atmosphere of the room, changed. Or take another example. Early in the war thirty-two young recruits met for the first time in a hut. After a visit by the Chaplain one recruit, as if flying a kite to test the feeling of the rest, said something against religion. At once a lad of 20 spoke up "I don't agree with you at all," he said, "I don't care where a fellow goes, but he ought to attend some place of worship. Life would be a poor thing without God. I know before I joined up if I had a Sunday without going to church things seemed to go wrong all the week." Thirty out of the thirty-two agreed with him. Why should we, any of us, weaken the cause of Christ, and cause the weak brother to stumble, because we are too cowardly to "say a good word for the Lord Jesus?" Why should it not be our part to "come to the help of the Lord against the mighty?"¹

"But," the objector will say, "how if the charges brought against religion are true?" But they are not, and it is perfectly easy to prove that they are not.

¹ Judges v. 23.

Take first the statement that Natural Science has proved Christianity untrue. Nothing could be more absurd. The heyday of the so called opposition of science to religion was the last thirty years of last century from the publication of the *Descent of Man* (1871), and the high priests of that opposition were Huxley and Tyndall. With the individual facts which science discovered, and relied on, the church had nothing to do. It was no business of hers either to affirm or deny them. The fact that leading churchmen were slow to accept Darwin's theory no more made the "church" an opponent of natural science than Disraeli's declaration, "For my part I am on the side of the angels," made "politics" an opponent of natural science. But of the philosophy which many men of science based on those facts, the materialistic conception of the universe, the idea of an universe from which, as Huxley said, "Science seeks to banish every idea of spirit and spontaneity," the church had rightly a great deal to say. At no time in history were the claims of science as against religion more arrogantly urged, or apparently more firmly based. Yet the view of the universe championed by Huxley and his school is now deader than Pharoah, utterly rejected and discredited among educated men. And it is rejected for precisely those reasons for which Christians rejected it when at its greatest height of reputation and influence. In a word (and it cannot be stated too plainly or repeated too often) the men of science were wrong and the church was right. There is to-day not a word in natural science which need hinder a man from being a practising Catholic.

Precisely the same is true of philosophy and psychology. At a recent meeting of philosophers I heard one of the chief men, though not I believe himself a Christian, say "I would by no means deny that in the near future philosophy will become more and more definitely theistic, and even perhaps Christian." No other philosophy, no other view that is to say of life as a whole, can find room for all the facts of experience, as Christianity can. If anyone disputes this statement let him ask any Materialist, Absolute Idealist, Pragmatist, or non-Christian Realist what explanation he has of evil, and especially of moral evil or sin.

Criticism has certainly modified our views of the Old Testament. But two things may safely be asserted. Firstly the religious and spiritual value of the Old Testament to-day is increased not decreased by the new knowledge, and secondly our views to-day are far more like those of the early church than the views of our grandfathers and grandmothers were. For my own part I think the criticism of the Old Testament has brought us nothing but gain. And this is even more true of the New Testament. The most violent and revolutionary utterances of extreme critics, from the absurdities of Van Manen on the epistles of S. Paul to M. Loisy's savage attack on the *Acts*, are quoted in the press as if they were the accepted results of an exact science, instead of the eccentricities of individuals which no serious scholar accepts. What we are not told, but what is none the less true, is that fifty years of such searching and unceasing criticism as no other books have ever been subjected to, has simply resulted in establishing, beyond question, the authenticity and

historic value of most (one might almost say of all but one or two of the least important) of the books of the New Testament and putting back the late dates, assigned to them in the period 1860-1890, to what tradition has always claimed for them.

As for the social work of the Church—and here I speak of all denominations, and of all who love our Lord—let the reader ask any Mayor, any Chief Constable, any School Attendance Officer, or any Health Visitor, what would be the condition of our great cities, or indeed of our country districts, if the churches ceased their religious, moral, and social work for a year. But no reader need put such a question. It has been already put and answered. During the crisis of the war the Home Office established a special Committee to promote and encourage, for all young people of both sexes employed in industry, social work of precisely the kind which the church has been doing for half a century, in clubs and camps and brigades. Truly, as Dr. Creighton said, when the Church has carried on any good work long enough to convince a careless world of its value, the State steps in, takes it over, and calls the process reform.

What I want is Christians who, having first convinced themselves, will then boldly declare to the world "Christianity, and Christianity alone, is and has what man needs." Often when I look round a great congregation I say to myself "What could not Christ do for and in this city if every man, woman and child here present really stood boldly for Him in the home, the

workshop and the playing field? ” There are such Christians. Why not more?

And as we can—and, if we wish to fulfil our baptismal vow, as we all must—be “ Christ’s faithful soldiers . . . unto our lives’ end ” ; boldly standing up for our faith, and refusing to sit silent while it is misrepresented, attacked, and belittled, so too we can and must be “ Christ’s faithful . . . servants ” working for the extension of His Kingdom. There is an immense amount of social and religious work waiting to be done, and workers are sadly lacking. People often say “ Oh ! we can’t all be Sunday School teachers and district visitors.” Certainly not. But a great many might be, who are not, and others might find other work they could do. For what purpose has any man or woman been granted powers of body, mind, or soul except to use them unstintingly in the service of others? I do not pretend that work for others is always pleasant or easy. What is worth giving must cost us something, and work worth doing must be done at the cost of some weariness, and discouragement, and self-denial. But if not always pleasant and easy at the time, especially at first, it is always richly rewarded. It is strange that so small a proportion of our young men of the upper and middle classes hear the call to work, as Scout Masters, Brigade officers, or Club workers, or in other ways, for the welfare of boys and young men less favourably situated. Many an ex-public school man can recall the effect upon him, in his younger days, of the friendship and inspiration of some master at school. Why do not such men try to do something in their turn for the rising generation of the workers. “ Freely ye have

received, freely give.”¹ They would if they realized the need for the work, and the ill that comes, alike to individuals and to society, from the lack of it. And even if a young man—or a young woman, since what is true of one is true of the other—does not feel able to do directly religious work, or work with individuals, there is boundless need for social and educational work. Surely no life ought to be entirely taken up with earning one’s living and enjoying one’s leisure. To “Getting” and “Spending” should be added “Giving,” and that not of money only but of self. Many ladies in the middle classes would be far happier if they spared an afternoon a week from social pleasures, and so-called social duties, and devoted it to friendly visits among their poorer neighbours. I know a lady who, having to earn her own living, has no money to give and little time. Yet since I began writing this chapter I have been to one of the half dozen homes she visits and the woman, an over-worked delicate mother of many children, said “I am sure I can’t say what Miss X.’s visit have been to me these last six years. Having her as a friend has been wonderful. I’ll never be able to thank her enough, or God for sending her.” So here are three rules for applied religion —

(i) Follow your conscience, and the guidance of the Holy Ghost, and leave the results to God.

(ii) Don’t be ashamed of the Gospel of Christ but let people know that you do believe it to be the power of God unto salvation.

(iii) Do some definite piece of religious or social work for others.

¹ S. Matt. x. viii.

CHAPTER XII

THE CHRISTIAN AND THE COMING KINGDOM

I AM sure that an immense, indeed an immeasurable advance in the effective power of religion, and therefore in human happiness, would immediately result from the adoption, by all Christians, of the three plain rules laid down at the end of the last chapter. But some of my readers, especially among young people, will be inclined to say "All this is very old fashioned, and amounts to no more than advice to make the best of things as they are. We want to alter things radically. Have you no advise to give us, beyond this world-old advice to try to rub along as best we can in a cruel and unjust world?" I would reply that I have some very definite advice to give. I welcome this spirit of what I may call "Christian revolution" and I long to see it re-mould the world. Let us see what we must aim at for the future.

We want a *New World*, and the realization of the *Kingdom of God*? Very good! Then we must look for these things as dependent on a change of mental outlook on the part of men. The Kingdom of Heaven is within us, and a *New World* implies *new men*. What are the ruling passions of fallen man? We may unhesitatingly accept the Buddhist psychology and reply that they are

Greed, Anger and Lust. What we need is a true change of mind (*μετανοία*, or repentance) in these three things. Let us consider them separately.

Greed. The lust to possess for possession's sake is one of the fundamental characteristics of fallen man. The author of that exquisite mystical treatise the *Theologia Germanica* declares that man fell, not when he eat an apple but when he first said "Me, My, Mine," when that is to say he desired something for his own exclusive possession. We are often told that no one will be discontented, envious, or unhappy under socialism since all will have enough. Those who talk like this know nothing of human nature. When men's hearts are set on material goods no one ever has enough, for the definition of "enough" is "a little more than you have got." The wealth per head in England to-day is vastly greater than it was in the reign of George I; and in the reign of George I was vastly greater than in the reign of William I. Yet it is very doubtful if the general level of happiness is higher to-day than in either of the previous eras. The poorest labourer to-day has within his reach comforts and refinements which were unknown to Lord Bacon. Yet Lord Bacon, in the sixteenth century lived a full, rich, happy, vivid life that any man in the twentieth century might envy. It is quite possible that by 2023 the wealth of the world will have increased a hundredfold. Yet if man still insists that his life does consist in the abundance of the things which he possesses the only result will be that the rich, the possessors, will be increasingly bored and distracted, and the poor, the dispossessed, increasingly bitter, envious and miserable.

Is there any cure? Will not most men, in all ages, strive to get rich? Certainly there is a cure. And though men will, and indeed should, strive to get rich, may we not hope that religion will teach them, even in the very near future, what are man's true riches? The lesson ought not to be hard to learn. Someone gives you, as a present, something not necessary for your real comfort or efficiency. To-day it is a pleasure; a fortnight hence it is forgotten except when immediately before your eyes; at the end of the year it is one more possession to collect dust and to be kept clean. On the other hand anyone who has ever tried seriously to emancipate himself from the tyranny of possessions, to live simply, to eat and drink no more than is necessary for health, avoiding expensive luxuries and rich foods, and to live "released from the wheel of things," knows how life grows in depth, richness and joy with each renunciation. Surely it should be possible to teach people that expensive food and rich wine, costly and luxurious clothes, large houses full of furniture, and lives spent running after amusement, never yet yielded any real happiness, while the real sources of pleasure are love, friendship, service, goodness, truth, beauty, nature, and the simple life. When men and women learn "having food and raiment to be therewith content"¹ there will be enough for all since the things which all will desire will be such as *increase by being shared*. Once, at a religious conference, I spoke on "evangelical poverty." After the meeting we had some music and then adjourned to dinner. My neighbour at table said to me chaffingly, "What is the moral difference between

¹ 1 Tim. vi. 9.

my enjoyment of a peach, and your enjoyment of a Beethoven sonata? I expect, if you take everything into account, the sonata costs most to produce." I replied "The difference is obvious. If you eat the peach, I can't. But if I listen to the sonata, you and a hundred others can listen too, not only with no diminution of my pleasure, but even with an increase of it through sympathetic understanding." Let the reader think how many of our "goods" are valued only, or chiefly, because they are exclusive. Would diamonds, for all their beauty, be as much delighted in if they were so cheap that all could enjoy them?

Is there not a certain vulgarity in the display of riches? If a party of ship-wrecked people are on a raft the man who takes more than his share of food or water is despised by everyone. But what of the Christian who spends needlessly on food, clothes, furniture, ornaments, amusements and similar things, while men, women and children—for whom Christ died¹—lack the bare necessities of life? There is no doubt that the sight of needless profusion and luxury on the part of professing Christians, while many all round them lack what is necessary for a decent standard of living, is a real cause of unbelief among the workers. I quite recognise that we cannot all live alike. The wife of a wealthy banker or merchant has social duties to perform, and her husband's position to keep up. But this I do say, that no person can be in earnest in his or her desire for the realization of the Kingdom of Heaven upon earth who is not prepared to endure some "hardness as a good

¹ Romans xiv. 15 and 1 Cor. viii. 11.

soldier of Jesus Christ,"¹ but insists on enjoying all the comforts, luxuries and enjoyments their means allow them to have. I fear most people think that the luxury of the idle rich begins in the class immediately above their own. If you want to hasten the coming of the Kingdom of God, try very earnestly and definitely for a simpler, less elaborate, less expensive style of living, first as a protest against any having too much while some go short, and secondly as a witness that the real "goods" of life are not material. I say again that anyone who will try it will prove for himself that a certain strictness and asceticism in matters of food, drink, and personal expenditure so far from decreasing the pleasures of life infinitely increases them.

And how are we to combat the second of the evil trio, namely Anger? It takes, of course, different forms in different persons. In one it is sudden and violent passion, the "short madness" of the ancients. In another it is cold, inflexible ill will, a habit, as we say in the North, of "chewing a grievance." But whatever form it takes it is deadly to the soul for it is always rooted and grounded in hatred, and "God is Love," and hatred and love cannot abide in one and the same heart. How are we to combat anger and hatred?

In this, more perhaps than in any department of life, it is necessary to learn to walk before we run. If after the war the Allies had said, "The ordinary common people in the countries we have been fighting were no more responsible for the war than ordinary private Englishmen, Frenchmen, or Russians. We will therefore repudiate all ideas of punishment or vengeance. All the burdens

¹ 2 Tim. ii. 3.

of the war shall be distributed on victors and vanquished alike ; all efforts for reconstruction shall be made in common ; all benefits shall be shared equally," what would have been the result ? Without going into details which would fill many volumes the size of this, we may say that the result would have been a gigantic step towards the coming of the Kingdom of Heaven and the immediate realization of a world fit for heroes to live in. Whereas we are now living in a world in every way worse than the pre-war world, and are in awful danger of another world war which *if it comes*, must inevitable destroy western civilization as completely as Roman civilization was destroyed by the irruption of northern barbarians. Why was not this statesmanlike and Christian policy pursued ? Because there was not, in any country, the attitude of mind which would have rendered it possible. No politicians can be much, if at all, better than the people they rule. Every country, it is said, has the rulers it deserves. Again and again, during the months after the war, excellent Christians used to say to me, " But you surely don't mean to say that, after all the wickedness they have committed, the Germans ought to be in as good a position as if they, and not we, had won the war ! Do you mean that they ought to go altogether unpunished ? " I always felt inclined to reply, " How many times this week have you said, in public and private prayer, ' Forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive them that trespass against us ' ? " It is quite vain to expect the coming of Christ's Kingdom in national and international affairs while most Christians not only make no effort to apply His teaching in daily life, but have not realized that there is any obligation to

try and do so. As well might we expect that a child who could not yet speak plainly to his nurse in the nurse's room when asking for his bread-and-milk would nevertheless deliver an eloquent speech at the City Council on civic affairs, or at the Hague on international peace. Let the reader ask himself, how many times he can remember performing any of the following obvious and elementary Christian duties :

(i) Replying gently, pleasantly, and in a gracious manner to some unprovoked rudeness.

(ii) Forgiving some real injury. I don't mean consenting to say no more about it after an apology has been offered, and one's pride satisfied by an admission on the offender's part that he was wrong, but quietly and with as little fuss as if no injury had ever been done.

(iii) Admitting a fault, and frankly asking forgiveness.

But if in private life few people believe in the value of the maxims " Resist not evil,"¹ " Love your enemies,"² " Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good,"³ what is the good of expecting the application of Gospel principles in the far more difficult and complicated field of public life ?

Now I know that what I have just written will irritate many of my readers. Let me therefore say two things quite plainly. Firstly no one pretends that it is easy to apply Christ's teaching. Many things, our own fallen nature, and an unchristian environment, and the low standards of professedly Christian society, and our own and our country's past, all combine to make it difficult. But just because it is difficult we must begin where it

¹ S. Matt. v. 39.

² S. Matt. v. 44.

³ Rom. xii. 21.

is easiest, namely in private life. If all professing Christians, for a generation, would try to put the Sermon on the Mount into practice in private life we might then be ready to practice it in national and international affairs.

But there is a second thing to be said. Many really good people believe not merely that they can't act in this way but that they ought not to do so. Not to punish the wicked, they say, is to encourage sinners to do evil. They really believe in punishment. They believe evil can be overcome by force. All honest beliefs must be respected. If anyone thinks it a duty to punish he must do so. But surely there is also a duty on everybody to test the truth of their beliefs. "Prove all things; hold fast that which is good."¹ Let anyone try, in dealing with children, servants, young people, and others, the effects of refusing to use force, and relying on gentleness and reason, and he will be astonished. Only when he finds the method fail let him look to it carefully, and see whether the failure is not really in himself. I will venture on a personal statement. I have been working with boys for more than 35 years. I have punished some, but I can never remember any, even the slightest, good coming of it. I have discarded punishment for years with the happiest results. I have, of course, had my failures. But even then I have always felt that the failure was really in myself. If I had cared for the boy more, and had more faith in the good in him, and refused more steadily to be annoyed by the evil, I should have succeeded. God succeeds by believing the best about

¹ 1 Thess. v. 21.

us, and by having patience. We must strive to learn and apply God's methods if we desire to see His Kingdom come.

And how are we to fight the third great evil, Lust? It would be absurd to deal with this gigantic question at the end of a volume. But one or two things are worth saying.

Firstly, we shall never hope to curb and control sexual passion while other bodily desires are left unchecked. How can we hope to curb the fiercest of bodily desires while in matters of getting up in the morning or going to bed at night, in matters of accepting or refusing what we like at table, or in matters of drink, sweets, and tobacco, the body is master. A Christianity with no note of asceticism will always be powerless in the world.

Secondly, we need to let psychology teach us the power of suggestion. The message of psychology to-day is of the boundless power of the imagination. What then is the result of the daily, I might almost say hourly, suggestion that sexual passion is the one important thing in life? I see in the street ten or twelve pretty little girls, of the senior class, just out of Day School, giggling at a shop window. They are looking at a windowful of picture postcards all as indecent and suggestive as the police will allow. I come in and open the latest popular novel sent me by the publishers. Its lesson is that passion, mis-called love, is something for which a man or woman should sacrifice everything else. In the press, at the theatre, by every voice of art, of literature, the same lesson is taught. Yet it is not true. In many of the richest, fullest, deepest

and most vivid lives passion has played, and is playing but a small part. In all the best lives it is curbed and restrained, is servant, not master. I do not believe that, even for the clergy, unless a man has a special vocation for it, the celibate life is any higher than the married. I am certain that for most men and women there is no nobler training school of character than the married state. I have already quoted my friend's testimony, "Since I and my wife were married we have fewer pleasures, but more happiness." But here too a note of Christian asceticism is needed. Till we have met the assertion of the world that sexual passion is the chief power in the world, and the one before which everything else does and should go down, with a defiant No, we are not ready to bring in the Kingdom of God.

Thirdly Christians must be on their guard against the view that since vice can't be prevented it is our duty to make it as little dangerous to health as possible. Many excellent people are carried away by these specious doctrines. There is no "safe" way of vice, and the only way of safety, whether for a man himself or for innocent third parties, is the way of self-restraint. All attempts, in the past, to make vice safe from the health point of view have but increased the evil

Fourthly Christian men and women should study moral questions and try to acquaint themselves with facts. It is not right to say that we dislike such topics, and do not care to hear them discussed. "My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge."¹

So we end where we set out from. Why does the Kingdom of God tarry? Why is its realization delayed?

¹ Hosea iv. 6.

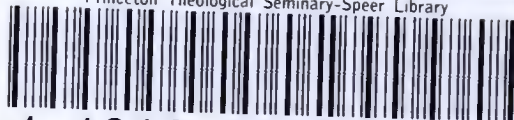
Because you and I and all men are not good enough.
Because our religion is not sufficiently our own, based
on real spiritual experience. Because our knowledge is
too small, our will too weak, or love too cold. We need
a great advance in personal religion.

THE END

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